



# National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee

## Corrected oral evidence: National plan for sport and recreation

Wednesday 23 June 2021

3.30 pm

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

Evidence Session No. 24

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 177 - 189

### Witnesses

**I:** Gordon Banks, Chief Community Officer, Saracens Sport Foundation; Martin Fearon, CEO, Accrington Stanley Community Trust; Steve Johnson, Disability Manager, Everton in the Community.

### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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## Examination of witnesses

Gordon Banks, Martin Fearon and Steve Johnson.

Q177 **The Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to our first group of witnesses to the National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee. They are representing our elite clubs. Could I first of all welcome Gordon Banks, the chief community officer for Saracens Sport Foundation? Welcome to you, Gordon.

**Gordon Banks:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You are very welcome. Welcome to Martin Fearon, the CEO of Accrington Stanley Community Trust. We have just been having a chat about Accrington Stanley. Lord Snape and I were both there in the final season of 1962. I hope you feel really at home this afternoon, Martin, with at least two of us.

**Martin Fearon:** Good afternoon.

**The Chair:** Steve Johnson is the disability manager at Everton in the Community. What a remarkable record you have, Steve, in that particular field. It was wonderful to read through your CV before today.

**Steve Johnson:** Thank you.

Q178 **The Chair:** During this inquiry, we are looking at sport and recreation, but we are looking at overall general fitness of the nation and getting people involved in activity and active lives. That is really at the heart of what we are doing. Elite sports clubs have been mentioned on a number of occasions. We have heard some really remarkable things they are doing down in Portsmouth and how they are helping kids get into school. Other clubs right across the country have made such major strides with their foundation trusts. We are really anxious to hear from you today and to hear some of the reasons why you are active within your communities.

I wonder if I could start with you, Gordon, please. Why is it really important that, as elite clubs with huge followings, you get involved in your communities? What is the real value that you add?

**Gordon Banks:** Good afternoon, everybody. It is really nice to be here. If I just talk about a Saracens perspective, successful professional sports clubs have to have a sense of ownership from their communities to be sustainable and successful in the long term, whatever league they are in. Clearly, football is 100 years ahead of where rugby is from a professional perspective and in the tribalism that has been created.

When Saracens became professional in 1995—I joined in 2002—it was imperative that the club engaged the community, helped to grow participation, grew the audience and created fans of the future, because without more people playing the game and engaged with the club, the club's future was probably uncertain. At a very basic level, clubs need to engage, because ultimately, a successful sports club has a sense of ownership by its community. That is where we started.

Once you understand the impact that the brand and professional sports can have and, as you suggest, some of the unique attributes that professional sports clubs can bring, and you are into it, you see it, and you live it, that creates that sense of responsibility. You know you can have a big impact. Therefore, there is a sense of responsibility that you should maximise that, both for the benefit of the community and the club in the longer term.

**The Chair:** Gordon, are you conscious of the need to work more closely with government to try to get your community more active? You can clearly give a massive lead, but does that link with government exist? Is it very much a hit-and-miss issue?

**Gordon Banks:** Generally, it is probably a hit-and-miss issue. We shared a stadium with Watford and we wanted to create our own home, so we worked with the London Borough of Barnet on taking over an old athletics stadium and rejuvenating and investing in that. As a result, we have a very positive relationship with our local borough. We sit on the strategic partnership board of the borough. We are very engaged in its challenges and issues and where we can add value.

The creation of the Saracens Multi-Academy Trust in our high school in the borough was a result of those conversations and understanding that the local authority needed a couple more secondary schools to create more places. We worked with it and felt that we could add some value there.

We have a very good relationship at a local authority level. We have some success of some funding at a national level. The recognition of what professional sports clubs can add can be improved in central government for sure.

**The Chair:** Just before I move on, Gordon, has anybody for instance come to you with the additional resources which the Government are making available for catch-up and summer play schemes? Do you fit into that at all, or are you always expected to fund those yourself as a professional club?

**Gordon Banks:** Yes, we have been approached by a couple of local organisations about summer play schemes and catch-up, but we have not been approached from central government with that invitation.

**The Chair:** Martin, a number of people on the committee know where Accrington is. We know there is a lot of poverty in that area. We know how affectionate people are for the club, Peel Park and all that goes with it. What do you regard as the importance of elite clubs having a real involvement with the community?

**Martin Fearon:** Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for inviting me here today. Just to give you an insight into Accrington Stanley Community Trust and answer the question, football clubs have been deeply rooted in the local community for generations. Professional football clubs in

particular have expanded their community reach enormously over the last 10 to 20 years with the advancement of community trusts and foundations.

Our charity was set up in 2010. We got promoted back into the Football League in 2006. Like you say, in 1962 the club went out of business. We lost a generation of fans. It took just over 40 years to return to the Football League, so we have been trying to build that back up in our local community, and we are doing that as a charity.

We are just over 10 years old now. We now have a turnover of above £1 million a year that we can invest back into our community. We are engaging with over 20,000 people in Hyndburn every year across 30 different projects that we deliver. We have four key themes: sport participation, education, health and well-being, and inclusion. All our projects fit within one of those themes.

We are seen as role models and positive influences within our community. We are really good at delivering positive change to all different ages and backgrounds. I picked out a study that the EFL did a couple of years ago, which said that 36.6 million people in this country lived within 10 miles of an EFL club. It is even more if you add the Premier League clubs into that. The EFL clubs collectively delivered 41.5 million hours of activity in 2019, which is absolutely remarkable.

We have thousands of children accessing sport and exercise each week, often in areas of high deprivation like Hyndburn, where Accrington is, which is in the top 10%. We have the ability as brand ambassadors of the football club and out in the community on the ground to deliver all these different projects. It is having a huge impact on so many people.

**The Chair:** Martin, can I ask you the same question I asked Gordon there? Have you had any involvement with the Government in terms of using your place within the community as a professional sports club to further activity, or do you fund it all yourself through fundraising through the trust?

**Martin Fearon:** We do a bit of both, really. We deliver on some government projects. We deliver on the National Citizen Service, the NCS. We have been doing that for about seven or eight years. That is a really good programme. We recently secured some funding from DCMS to tackle loneliness. During the pandemic, we received about £20,000 to engage with the elderly people in our community who were at risk of social isolation and poor mental health due to the pandemic.

We link in with government as well as delivering funded projects from the likes of the Premier League and the English Football League Trust. We also deliver education contracts; we have college courses, and we do foundation degrees. There is a good link there. I think it can get better, but there is definitely a link. We need to work together.

**The Chair:** Brilliant. Thanks ever so much, Martin. Steve, what a

reputation Everton in the Community has.

**Steve Johnson:** Yes. Very much so, yes. We are a professional club, but the Methodist church started off the team in 1878 and wanted to get the local congregation involved in sports activity. We have always been involved with the local community.

Our aims and objectives are to improve the lives of the local community. We have had our charity for over 30 years now. I have been working on the disability programme for 17 years. The main areas we focus on are sport, education, health and support. We have over 40 projects that we deliver in the local community to look at different social issues.

**The Chair:** Why do you do it, Steve? Why does the club not just concentrate on what it does best, which is playing football in the Premier League?

**Steve Johnson:** We genuinely want to improve the lives of our local community. It has a knock-on effect with the team as well, because the fans get closer to the club and a greater affiliation to the club through a lot of the work that we deliver. They really appreciate what we are trying to do for the local community. It builds a stronger fanbase for the club; that is the main reason, I would think. We want to change the lives of our community.

In 2019, we had a social value report on the work that we do. For every £1 spent on Everton in the Community, there was a societal value of £14.74. That was what it was worth. We had a turnover of £4 million that year, so that equated to £55.58 million of societal value. There is definitely a need for that, and it is definitely worth investing in time and money.

**The Chair:** Steve, the inclusion agenda, particularly of youngsters with disabilities, has long been Everton's real gold star. Could that be adopted elsewhere? You obviously have your own personal tale, but why has Everton become such a champion of that particular agenda?

**Steve Johnson:** I would like to think that my role there has helped to do that. The club has been right behind me and has helped me to grow the project. Originally, it was about trying to give disabled people the same sports opportunities as non-disabled people. That has changed tack now and we are supporting people in everyday life through providing work placements, job opportunities and paid employment volunteer opportunities. Not just in sport, but in everyday life, we are trying to change things for disabled people.

It could be done in other areas. Some of the issues are that a lot of the people we work with are from a low socioeconomic background. There is not a lot of funding within that, and we have to work hard to do fundraising, apply for funding and keep that project going. That might be a stumbling block for other organisations.

**The Chair:** I will move on to someone who has a lot of knowledge in this

area.

Q179 **Baroness Brady:** Good afternoon everyone. Thanks for joining us, and thank you, Lord Chair. I know first-hand the real positive impact that football clubs can have within their communities, so I take my hat off to you all. I am really interested to know about the key challenges you are facing and the opportunities to engage with underrepresented groups in the community.

**Gordon Banks:** Thanks, Baroness Brady. This is an area that we are doing more and more work in. Being honest, rugby is probably a particular challenge due to its historical background. It has predominantly been a middle and upper-class sport for white boys. Thankfully, that has changed dramatically since the development of professionalism, but there is still lots of work to do. It is important to understand, once you get into inclusion and tackling underrepresentation, that those barriers are sometimes there for complex reasons. So it is not necessarily an easy thing to tackle, but we are making really good strides.

In particular, I am aware of the work that Steve does in Everton in the Community on disability. Hats off to the brilliant work you guys do. As somebody from that part of the world who is a red—

**The Chair:** Steady on.

**Gordon Banks:** —I know that Everton are leaders in this area. They do brilliant work. In the area of disability, we have done some really great work specialising in autism. We now run seven disability projects each week with a real specialism on autism, but we are also doing some work with wheelchair rugby. We have found that we have been able to have a dramatic impact not only on increasing participation but, subsequently, on improving personal skills. We are doing more and more on the employability of young people with disabilities, so that work is evolving and growing all the time.

As a club, we are really lucky. The Saracens women's team has been historically more successful than Saracens men. It has won more championships than we have and has just missed out this year on winning a third championship in a row. We have been working much more closely with the women's side, and now it is fully integrated into the club. As part of that, we are doing more work on women's and girls' sport, not only on participation and increasing access and participation to the sport but particularly in other areas. We have created a women and girls advisory board, which is working closely with us.

As an example, we just ran a six-week resilience programme online. Seven hundred girls participated, and it was really successful. Each week, one of our elite athletes, either from the Saracens women's team or the Saracens Mavericks netball team, joined the conversation on broader issues, so they were not just sporting conversations but conversations about resilience and women and leadership in sport. That was very well received, and we are building on that work too.

**Q180 Lord Hayward:** Gordon, can I ask you a specific question? I note that you are using the terms "foundation" and "club" interchangeably. I know the separation, but as you will be aware I was the founder-chairman of the world's first gay and inclusive rugby club. Two years ago, Billy Vunipola substantially damaged Saracens as a brand, and rugby, with the gay and lesbian community. What action did the foundation take at the time? What conversations did you have with the club at that time? In what way has either the foundation or the club attempted since then to reach out to the gay and lesbian community?

**Gordon Banks:** Thank you for that. I am sure we will go on to talk about the real positive role that our elite athletes can play in this area of work, and I am pleased to say that predominantly that is the case and that they are fantastic ambassadors. Clearly, from time to time, players share personal views that do not represent the club, and this was a case in point.

I sit across in that I am a trustee of the foundation and have dealings with the club. The club did talk to the foundation at that time. There were some meetings. The club has a very clear equality, diversity and inclusion policy that runs across the organisation. The key statements in that policy were reiterated across the organisation, and we made it clear that Billy's view that he expressed at the time was in no way the view of the club.

The foundation does not currently do any specific work with the gay and lesbian community, so the foundation is not engaged in a particular project in that area at the moment. But the club has made it very clear where it stands in terms of its policy.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you for that.

**Q181 Baroness Brady:** I am sure Lord Hayward would like to come back to that, but we will move on. Gordon, could you just explain to the committee how you decide which underrepresented groups to target? Who sets the agenda and pushes you to achieve it, and how do you measure your success?

**Gordon Banks:** That is a really good question. Our programming and conversations about new programming always come from community upwards. One of the most important aspects of our work is to understand the community in which we operate—the other partners that are working within that community and in the different sectors.

What are the challenges? As I said earlier, we work very closely with the local borough to understand its strategic objectives and some of its challenges. Conversations and ideas stem from there. It is pointless to create programmes that are not meeting need or gaps specifically. They always come from ostensive need, gaps and opportunities.

On the question of how we measure, I know, because I have been involved in this area of work for over 18 years, that professional sports clubs have become very sophisticated in measurement and evaluation.

Steve mentioned a social impact report that Everton did, which provided that very detailed review and value to the work they do. We are undertaking a very similar piece of work at the moment. Every programme that we run has clear outcomes, measurement methodologies and tools. They are reported on a programme basis, and then we report them very clearly on an annual basis.

**Baroness Brady:** Do you use that to get more funding?

**Gordon Banks:** Yes. It is very important. If you cannot demonstrate the outcomes that you are achieving, your likelihood of getting future funding is diminished significantly. Those of us involved in sport used to just know. We used to say, "We know it's good for you. We know it has benefits. We know sport develops team and communication skills". We were not particularly good at measuring, demonstrating or reporting, and I think we have come a long way from that perspective. We spend a lot of time and resource. We use Upshot as a platform, like many other clubs do.

**Baroness Brady:** Thank you very much, Gordon. I fully understand it now. I would like to just say hello to Steve. How are you, Steve?

**Steve Johnson:** I am very well, thank you.

**Baroness Brady:** Good. What are the key challenges in getting underrepresented groups involved in your activities?

**Steve Johnson:** For disabled people, we link in with a lot of different organisations across the Merseyside area that link in with disabled people. It could be the local authority.

**Baroness Brady:** Is the football the linchpin to getting people who would not otherwise do any activity involved?

**Steve Johnson:** Without a doubt. The power of the badge is huge. It is absolutely massive, really. Some of our projects are not necessarily about sport—some are about health and stuff like that—but the actual badge pulls a lot of people in. Those projects have been more successful. I do not have the research with me, but some of our research shows that, when the club gets involved, more people get involved than they did previously in, for example, NHS projects.

The badge can do so much and engage with so many people because so many people have an affinity to that. It is not just, in our case, Everton supporters; we also engage a lot with Liverpool supporters and all different football supporters. It is definitely a hook to get people in, and government could probably use it to make projects more successful.

**Baroness Brady:** It is the trust around the badge, is it not?

**Steve Johnson:** Yes.

**Baroness Brady:** And finally over to you, Martin.



**Martin Fearon:** I would say that integration into mainstream activities is a challenge. We tend to find that underrepresented groups feel more comfortable in their own setting with familiar faces. How do we try to break that chain?

Changing mindsets is also a challenge. A lot of people do not want to try something they have not done before, and they may have a perception that something is not inclusive when it is. The England Lionesses have done a great job in promoting women's and girls' football. On the back of their success over the last few years, we have created six Accrington Stanley girls' and ladies' teams at various different age groups. That has been a huge success.

Confidence and self-esteem are a massive challenge. Can we get people out of their comfort zones and inspire them to engage with us? What Steve said about the power of the club badge is absolutely crucial.

The last challenge for me is that finance can sometimes be a barrier. We are in a top 10% deprived area. If there is a cost attached to any sports sessions, many people cannot afford it. It is a matter of whether we can get more funding to put on free sessions or sessions at very minimal cost so that there is no barrier to participation through finance.

In terms of opportunities, a lot of work is being done to boost participation with underrepresented groups. We are doing a lot of work with women and girls. We are doing a lot of work with our BAME community. Hyndburn has an 18% BAME community, but when we look at the football club and the attendances, we probably have 1% attending games. There is a huge disparity there in terms of the local population and who is attending the football club. So we are doing a lot of work there with our BAME community.

A new £9 million mosque has been built in Accrington. Our staff have been attending and speaking to groups to try to engage them with Accrington Stanley by delivering workshops on who we are and what we do, but also promoting our community and sports sessions. We are seeing a positive impact from that. Working alongside organisations like Kick It Out and This Girl Can will only strengthen that and help us to increase the participation in underrepresented groups.

Q182 **The Chair:** We have heard regularly during this inquiry that, when trying to get underrepresented groups, and particularly BAME groups, one of the problems is that the people they meet do not look like them. Do you have people on your staff who do look like them, who come from Asian, Bangladeshi, or Pakistani backgrounds, which are really the main element within Hyndburn?

**Martin Fearon:** Yes. We identified a key need to engage further with the community. We have a trustee now who is the chairman of the mosque in Accrington. That has been a crucial link in us engaging further with the BAME community, and we are starting to see some positive interactions. We tend to find that find they are more comfortable participating in

informal activity than formal activity, so we are testing the water with various different projects to try to boost the numbers attending. Once they attend, we can then engage with them further. All the barriers will be down and we can then signpost into mainstream activity. Yes, it is crucial to have staff and trustees from all different backgrounds who represent your community.

**Q183 Lord Snape:** This question is for you, Steve, to start. Everton have lots of star players. In fact, you could probably claim that it was a team full of stars. What role do they play in grass-roots participation? Do they go out? Do they have an outreach programme to see various groups in the community? Is it a formal thing or do they volunteer to do it? If it works, how does it work?

**Steve Johnson:** It is a bit of both, really. Our comms team and player liaison officer link closely with the club. We have access to players for various different events like raising awareness of specific days. For example, for International Women's Day, our professional female team was involved with some of our community programmes to promote the day.

Some of those players get involved in other activities as well outside of what they are contracted to do. If they have an interest in a specific programme, they will get involved. Séamus Coleman, for example, has a disabled brother, so he is really involved with our disability programme. He is the ambassador for our disability football programme as well. A lot of players also contribute to the foundation through their wages to support the programme.

Some of our disabled international players recently took part in an innovative programme in which we let them do the kit launch for Everton's third kit. It was the fastest-selling kit that Everton have ever had. There are benefits for using other groups as well, but we have a lot of access to players. We have over 40 programmes that they support, and they raise the awareness of those different projects.

**Q184 Lord Snape:** Can I just ask you about the attitude of the players themselves? How do they feel about doing that? Do they feel that it is worth while? As sometimes happens, do they think they should do it because they are expected to do it? What is their general view?

**Steve Johnson:** From my interaction with them, I would say that they are always keen to get involved and learn about the programme if they do not already know about it. A lot of them stay a lot longer than they should with a lot of the programmes. Yes, they really are keen to get involved in it.

**Lord Snape:** The media are apt to pick on the things that go wrong. I am always amazed that young players who earn the money that they do are as responsible as they are, to be honest. I do not know how I would have behaved at 18 or 19 while earning the sort of money that some of them do. It is enormously to their credit, and perhaps they do not get the credit they should get for it.

**Steve Johnson:** Yes. Some of the under-23 players are a bit hesitant because they are not used to being outside that bubble of always being in that football environment. They need a bit of support to get involved, but once they get involved there are no issues whatsoever. They really enjoy getting involved in the community programmes.

**Lord Snape:** Thank you. Gordon, is the situation similar for Saracens?

**Gordon Banks:** Yes, we are really lucky. The work we do through the foundation and the school is core to what Saracens is about. It is a key part of our strategy. The players are very proud of what we do off the pitch and are very supportive.

Players, when we need them to, will come out to particular events and help to shine a light on things and bring some attention. We have always had a player as a trustee. Richard Hill, Jamie George, and Calum Clark have been trustees. Their role is to connect the squad with the work of the charity. We have been working on trying to educate players more about what we do so that they are keen to participate on their own terms rather than just for the visits that we organise that are more formal.

That is working really well. Maro Itoje is obviously quite a high-profile guy. He is very involved in education, and he led a big digital divide campaign during lockdown. We managed to secure 600 laptops to donate to local schools in areas of deprivation. He helped to bring a couple of companies to the table to get behind that. Our former player Will Fraser has got very involved in the work we do in prisons. He is now actively involved in going into Feltham young offender institution and talking to the inmates as part of the programme about sporting values. Jackson Wray is very involved in our disability work and is a regular attendee on a Monday night of a couple of our sessions there. Getting that personal engagement is really powerful.

As Steve alluded to, a lot of these guys are young guys who are increasingly protected. We have a big emphasis on developing players off the pitch as people. Exposing them to this work, some of the people we work with, and the conversations they have is an important part of their learning and their life skills. We are stressing that to them. Let us not lock them away. Let us make sure that they are great athletes, but let us make sure that they are good people who understand the value of this work as well. We are getting some real good progress on that front.

**Lord Snape:** Thank you. Martin, as a lifelong Stockport County fan, I am conscious that the fleshpots of Stockport and Accrington are not perhaps as tempting as they would be for some of the famous players in London and Manchester. Do the first-team players and those on the fringes of the first team have a responsibility to the town? Do they have a duty to be seen around and assist grass-roots sport in the area?

**Martin Fearon:** Yes, definitely. We are quite lucky, because lots of our players love attending community sessions. They see it as giving back to the local community. They also remember the joy it brought when they

were at school and a famous person or a football player attended. Player appearances are a big focus area for us. Pre-pandemic, we were delivering about 200 player appearances a year. In 2019, we did just short of 350 hours of player appearances, which were fantastic.

There are different types of things that they do and events. We do question and answer sessions at schools. We get the players involved in sports coaching and motivational talks. Each year, we take them on to the children's ward of the local hospital at Christmas to give out some gifts for the children who are unfortunately in hospital at that time of year. They also attend grass-roots events like awards ceremonies.

They are role models at the end of the day. It does not matter whether it is an Accrington Stanley, Man United, or West Ham player. The children absolutely love it when they attend the session, and it has an amazing effect on them. I had a look at the EFL's social impact report, which said that the 72 EFL clubs gave back around £6 million in player appearances each year in the time they spent in the community. They are a remarkable resource, and we all need to use it as much as we can. It will only benefit and inspire young people.

**Q185 Lord Knight of Weymouth:** I just wanted to come back to Steve principally. I was listening to the radio a few weeks ago in the aftermath of the furore around the ridiculous European Super League. Owen Hargreaves was being interviewed and he talked about the time when he played in Germany. Partly because of the nature of the fan relationship with governance, there was an expectation on every player to regularly get in the car and drive around Germany to visit fan groups and engage with fans. This happened in a stronger and much more systematic way than it did when he played in this country.

Is there further for us to go? Do we need to do more to write this into players' contracts? I accept that most will do it willingly, but if we are to do as well as Germany, is there more that we should do?

**Steve Johnson:** I believe so, yes, without a doubt. A lot of it is governed by the manager at that time and their views on it. Some of the players are contracted to do so many hours a week for player appearances and stuff like that, but it definitely has so much of a positive impact that they should definitely do that, without a doubt.

**Q186 Baroness Morris of Yardley:** This is just a quick question on a point of clarification. You have talked a lot about the relationship between the club and the foundation. We have just talked about players and you have talked about representation on the board. Can I just check? Presumably, some or all of you are in premises that are owned by the club, and you get resourced in kind. I do not know.

You could be part of the IT system. Do the clubs give you cash? Do they give you a grant each year? If they do not, I know you get a grant from the Premier League, EFL, or whichever league you are in, but other than that, you are into bits with the Government. You talked about doing work for the Government. Presumably, no one will give you the money. You

are bidding for those contracts. Eventually, you do not get them, they run out, or they are not offered.

My question is: are any of your clubs giving you a grant each year for your own use that is untied money? Is it all in kind through the relationship with the club?

**Steve Johnson:** Yes, we get a grant from the club in cash. We also get premises IT support, people services support, and all that in kind. I am not sure how much it is. You would have to ask the COO about that, but we definitely do get some funding.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** You get cash.

**Steve Johnson:** We get cash, yes.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Thanks.

**Gordon Banks:** We do. We are very fortunate. Our owner is probably the biggest supporter of the work we do in the community, but it becomes tricky for many professional sports clubs that lose money every year. We are lucky that the owner gives us money. We are now very fortunate that all our major commercial partners, as part of their relationship, have to support the foundation and the programme. We now have relationships with all our partners. The club is brilliant at tying in all of that and making sure that the foundation is well supported.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** You do not have the club and the foundation competing for the same pool of commercial sponsors.

**Gordon Banks:** No. The foundation's work is so much at the core of what the club wants to do that it wants to make sure that all our partners are also involved in what the foundation is doing.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Excellent.

**Martin Fearon:** We do not receive any funds from the football club, but we get a lot of in-kind support with the player appearances. Our owner, who many of you might have seen on Twitter, is very complimentary about our community work. He backs us on everything that we do. We do a joint project every year where every year 3 child in Hyndburn gets an Accrington Stanley home shirt. That costs about £30,000 a year, which is a lot for a club like us. We do that every year so that every child at that age group gets an Accrington Stanley shirt.

**Baroness Brady:** Just very quickly, the committee should know that players have to do six hours a week in their contract of community work, and they do it. Do not forget that the foundation money that comes via the Premier League is the Premier League's money, so Everton is giving its own money to Everton in the Community.

**The Chair:** Baroness Brady, do the players of every club in the Premier League have to do that?

**Baroness Brady:** It is in every standard professional contract, yes.

**The Chairman:** Fantastic. Thanks very much indeed for that clarification.

Q187 **Baroness Sater:** I am just moving into the areas of your relationships with the local authorities. You have touched on it briefly, with some of you having very good relationships with the local boroughs. Could you describe your relationships with the local authorities and the local active partnerships? If they are good relationships, is there anything you would like to change that would either build on that relationship or improve it?

A secondary question to put with this is: how much do you co-operate and collaborate with the other clubs, delivery bodies, health bodies, and other groups in your communities to deliver sport in your local area?

**Martin Fearon:** In terms of the local authority, our relationship is good. It has improved in recent years since the new owner came in at Accrington Stanley, made the club more stable and built better facilities. We were a club that was close to going to the wall for a second time, but we have that stability now. That has improved the relationship with the council, because we were leasing a lot of facilities and the ground from the council. Tax bills and unpaid things that were going on for years damaged that relationship, which also made it difficult for us.

I am pleased to say that in the last five or six years we have had a really good relationship with the council. We have worked closely on a facility project over the last few years. We identified run-down council playing fields about 500 yards from our stadium. We opened a £2.5 million community facility in March last year, and that is where our charity is based now. That is a good case study of how it has worked well with the local authority from building that relationship.

As part of that, we have secured a £1 million grant from the Football Foundation, which DCMS, Sport England, and the Premier League also contribute to. We are really appreciative of that. Once Covid restrictions allow, we will engage with 2,000 people a week at this new facility. It is really good.

In terms of the active partnerships, we sit on a number of different steering groups with various agendas relating to sport, health and inclusion. We are delivery partners on two projects I will just mention. One is tackling reoffending and integration. It is a peer-mentored support package to mitigate people at risk of reoffending after they are released from prison. We use sport as a vehicle to try to make positive interactions and experiences for these people and try to guide them on the right path to live more productive lifestyles. That is a really good programme that we are delivering with the active partnerships.

We also started community blood pressure checks with Active Lancashire and the British Heart Foundation. We trained all our staff on how to take their blood pressure. We did about 300 checks in our community in the space of a couple of months. It also identified quite a number of people at potential risk of hypertension, so we fed that straight back to the system,

and they went to go and see their GP for further checks. That is slightly different from sport that uses the power of the club for how we can engage in that area.

On your second question about other clubs, we are part of a network of 72 EFL clubs. There are 92, if you include the Premier League. All the professional clubs have their own charities or foundations. We will deliver national programmes like NCS and Premier League-funded projects like Primary Stars and Kicks. We work more strategically on a local level and do county-wide projects in Lancashire. A group of seven Lancashire clubs created Lancashire United. All the club trusts got together, and we deliver across Lancashire on various different projects. That is an example of how we work together.

Most community trusts and foundations see each other as partners rather than competitors, so that helps because we are sharing good practice and working together rather than against each other. That has been good. Overall, we work with the leisure trusts, other charities and the NHS. We have a number of different partners that we are working well with.

**Steve Johnson:** We have a good relationship with our local authority. It probably does not have the resources to deliver that it had previously, so it is probably not a rival to us. We have a good relationship with it. Recently, we put joint bids together through them, the county FA and other delivery partners to apply for funding through Active Through Football.

We also have other partnerships with health partnerships. Similarly, we have the Kicks programme and stuff like that. We also work closely with the Liverpool Foundation on different projects. It is a joint partnership, really, rather than being seen as rivals. We have a number of different programmes with the LFC Foundation in which we try to deliver different messages.

Q188 **Baroness Sater:** Is there a partnership or organisation that you would like to deal with that you are not dealing with at the moment?

**Steve Johnson:** That is a good question. I cannot think of one at the moment, sorry.

**Baroness Sater:** You have open doors to lots of organisations.

**Steve Johnson:** Yes. As I said, we have 40-odd different projects. We have lots of different partners within that that support each of those different programmes. If anyone came to us with some resources and wanted to deliver a project, we would definitely be very open to delivering that.

**Gordon Banks:** I mentioned this briefly earlier. We moved to Barnet in North London. We started talking to them in 2011 and the stadium opened in 2013. The whole premise of that partnership was to take Cophall athletics stadium, a very old athletics stadium that was used very infrequently outside of Tuesday or Thursday nights, and turn that

into a home not just for Saracens but for athletics and a thriving community hub site. In fact, our foundation is a co-signatory on the lease agreement with the council. The foundation is very much at the heart of that work and the projects and initiatives that are run from the stadium.

We were really determined to deliver on all our commitments. After five years, we were given the freedom of the borough in recognition for the impact we had had on the local community, which was fantastic. I sit on the strategic partnership board for the council along with the police, Middlesex University, Brent Cross and other big organisations in the local borough. We sit around the table and look at the challenges and opportunities for the borough. Of course, the challenges are significant post-pandemic.

They are really looking to the partnership group to come together, to help to solve issues together and to add value. They have been doing that much more effectively over the last six to eight months. We have helped them review their latest strategic plan. We have contributed to that. We have had a couple of meetings with them in which we have identified opportunities with the council in areas where we think we can add value. Engaging young children in care is one example. We are starting to have conversations about how we can use the foundation, sport, and the club to engage that particular group.

Good conversations and partnership work are happening. The stadium has been seen as a catalyst for the development of the broader site that we sit on, which is the Copthall site. We are a key partner in discussing a masterplan for that site and the council investing in the broader site as a real venue for sport, recreation and health.

You asked if there was a partnership that we would have liked to establish. The Prime Minister recently visited the big vaccination centre that we are running with the NHS on the site at the moment. That has led to some really useful conversations with the NHS and our local CCG about future services and activities that we can run from the stadium through the foundation in partnership with the CCG. The health sector has been very difficult to crack over the last few years in terms of knowing who to speak to. We have finally got to the right people and are having some really fruitful conversations there.

**Baroness Sater:** Martin, is there an organisation or partnership that you would like to work with that you have not been able to work with so far?

**Martin Fearon:** Not in particular, no.

Q189 **Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Thanks for all those answers. It has been fascinating. Eventually, we will have to incorporate it into a report, and then give some recommendations. What is your top recommendation that would like to see us include in the report?

**Steve Johnson:** We are supported by the club, but we have to raise a lot of the funds and resources ourselves to deliver a lot of the programmes that we do. It is a full-on challenge to try to keep the programmes going



and make them sustainable. Some of the groups we work with are from low socioeconomic groups, and it is a challenge. I know it is a simple thing, but more resources would definitely help.

The power of the badge is massive. If you have projects that you want to deliver, then deliver them through the football club. We are not just football coaches now. We have a lot of staff who are experts in their fields, whether that is health or stuff like that. It would definitely be worth running those programmes or projects through community programmes, football clubs or rugby clubs.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Does that change your relationship? I assume that at the moment you see that you can bid for public sector money and you bid for it. No one comes to you and says, "Will you be partners? We'll pay you for the partnership". Is that the shift that you would like to see?

**Steve Johnson:** The Government have come to some of our other programmes to do with county lines and stuff like that. We have a big project on that kind of thing, really. If government could come to us, that would also be great. For my programme, for example, it is a challenge to try to keep everything going.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Thanks ever so much. Gordon, what would be your recommendation?

**Gordon Banks:** Clearly, this is the most difficult question. It is difficult to think of one thing. I really hope, from the work that you guys are doing here in this conversation, that at national government level there can be a real understanding and appreciation of the power that professional sports clubs have. They have the ability to influence not only participation but social impact generally. That ability for government to engage with professional sports comes directly strategically from knowing that they are a significant partner and have the ability to make a real difference.

Having that level of understanding at central government level would be very powerful. As others have suggested, you often have to work incredibly hard to search out opportunities for funding and the local authorities. A lot of clubs are involved now across so many areas, as we have discussed today, that it can be quite challenging knowing who you need to talk to and what you need to do. I would recommend having an understanding at central government level and the real knowledge that this is a significant number of key partners.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** It is part of a structure.

**Gordon Banks:** Exactly. That would be my real ask.

**Martin Fearon:** Fairer distribution in funding in football from the top down is important. I say that, because it does not just impact the football clubs; it impacts the community. There has been a lot of bad press for the big six clubs recently because of the European Super League, but that

does not tell the full story of football, community spirit and togetherness that has been built for generations.

I have given an insight into our story as one of the 92 professional club charities in this country. The work that we are all doing collectively is helping millions of people. There is enough funding for a healthy pyramid in which all clubs can prosper. If we lose a club, we also lose the charity and foundation that is engaging with thousands of people on a weekly basis. If we do not get the funding right and clubs start going to the wall, we will lose charities that are doing all this great work. Something has to be done to look at that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. That brings us to the end of the session. My colleagues would agree that your statements on our final question have probably been some of the strongest of any group of people we have had during the whole inquiry, and we take that very much to heart. Gordon, the plea to use the power and influence of professional clubs will not go unnoticed. That understanding that, if a club dies, its community trust dies with it is again something that we take very strongly to heart.

Could I thank all of you for your contributions this afternoon? You are a brilliant snapshot of what is happening across the country. It was good to get a real smattering of different areas and, indeed, different sizes of clubs and organisations. Thank you to Gordon Banks, Martin Fearon and Steve Johnson. We are enormously grateful to you.