

Written evidence submitted by Sporting Change

Introduction

Sporting Change exists to put sport to work. We support, connect and help sports to grow for the benefit of their communities.

Our focus is building partnerships to *make sport work harder* for our communities.

As a community focussed organisation, we are very proud to include Erdington Rugby Club in Birmingham as one of our clients. Erdington have recently become the inaugural winner of the Gallagher's Grassroots Rugby Club - Season 2019 – 2020.

We believe passionately that national and local government need to see *over-investment in sport and activity* at a local level not as additional money going into perceived 'wealthy' sports but as proactive local community policies to positively impact on the health and wellbeing of our society. The positive social outcomes in respect of health, crime and social integration significantly outweigh the upfront investment.

Why do we need Community Clubs?

- Sport and activity are critical for our long-term physical and mental well-being
- Clubs and their spaces makes sport and activity accessible for the vast majority of our nation
- Many clubs have a long history within our communities and indeed have successfully created sustainable communities of their own
- Our most proactive Clubs are evolving to also be Hubs for all members of the local community providing a safe place for communities to come together
- Through sport, our Clubs provide an opportunity for community differences to be bridged
- Often undervalued in a more corporate sporting world, our amateur clubs provide the sustainable network and pathway that our elite sport is built upon.
- Without a diverse and thriving amateur Club network the sustainability of all of our sports (without exception) are vulnerable to extreme shocks to their commercial revenues

How must our Community Clubs continue to evolve?

- First and foremost, we must ensure that as many as possible survive through COVID-19
- Once we have ensured our Clubs are sustainable we must ensure our Clubs do the following:
 - They are supported to become more accessible to everyone in their local community
 - They are supported to be safe and welcoming to all
 - They provide spaces for both sport and activity
 - They are supported to understand and deliver on the power they have to bring communities together through their sport

Our specific response to your questions?

- 1) Are current sports governance models fit for purpose?
 - At what level of sport should the government consider spending public money?

Sport in our communities is driven by people with the passion and determination who give their time and energy to set clubs and 'sport for good' initiatives up and keep them going through thick and (like current times) thin.

'Governance' is generally fit-for-purpose yes, and good governance is very important, but compliance with governance requirements (especially for community sport clubs in receipt of public funds via eg. Sport England) can be energy-sapping and can take volunteers' time away from actually building better community sport.

Therefore, whilst we must guide and support our Clubs to make decisions that deliver the best sporting and activity outcomes for everyone in their local communities, it is also important that governance requirements don't become so rigid that they exclude the one or two key volunteers that have made a Club sustainable.

2) What are the biggest risks to the long-term viability of grassroots sport?

- What key measures could the Government introduce to increase the resilience of sports clubs and venues?

The biggest risk to the long-term viability of grassroots sport is that there will no longer be the people there to step forward and make community sport happen. To protect and encourage more resilient and robust grassroots sport in communities, government needs to invest in these people and in initiatives and ideas that encourage people to get involved and stick at it

Money (whether its public money or not) is not actually the first consideration — it is good people who make it happen, who sustain it, and who should be the first consideration — 'government's' first priority should be finding ways to better enable, equip, encourage, recognise and support these most important people

Government should therefore consider spending public money on structures and organisations that can take on the burden of governance and compliance, or who can build more capacity and resilience within community sport.

Similarly, government could consider tax incentives for people or organisations who donate their time in official capacities to community sport Clubs and projects.

3) To what extent should elite professional sports support the lower leagues and grassroots?

- How should the Government make this happen?

As noted above, it is local people not handouts from the elite end of sports that make great things happen with sport in our communities.

That said, the professional end of sport's pathways can feel too distanced from their grassroots. For a sport to thrive rather than just survive it is essential that different organisations within a sport, both professional and amateur, feel genuinely part of a joined-up plan to grow their game.

All sports must continually work on being connected, but to find answers government should not exclusively direct their questions about grassroots sport to elite sport governing bodies when many of these representatives are not sufficiently connected to accurately reflect the views of all at the grassroots end of 'their' sport.