

Written evidence submitted by the Mayor of London

‘Sport in our communities’ DCMS Select Committee Inquiry, November 2020

Introduction

The Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the DCMS Committee’s inquiry into ‘sport in our communities’.

This submission focuses on community sport and physical activity and refers mainly to evidence and insight from stakeholders, delivery partners and beneficiaries of the Mayor of London’s Sport Unites community investment programme (2018-21, £8.8m). However, increased collaborative efforts by individuals and organisations – sport and non-sport – in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled broader engagement during 2020 with a wider evidence base; and revealed a growing call for collective action to support the sector’s survival, recovery and reform.

Creating the optimal conditions in which sport in our communities can flourish is the core purpose of the 43 Active Partnerships across England – who work collaboratively with local partners to help transform lives through sport and physical activity. London’s Active Partnership is London Sport, which exists to make the capital the most physically active city in the world. It partners with Local Authorities and other agencies to support less active Londoners in building physical activity habits that support their health, wellbeing and prosperity.

Core-funded by Sport England, London Sport is also supported by the Mayor of London, who appoints the Chair of its Board and two trustees. This, together with key areas of alignment between London Sport’s strategy and Sport for all of us – the Mayor, Sadiq Khan’s, strategy for sport in the capital – enables some effective collaboration in reducing Londoners’ inactivity, building stronger communities and reinforcing the capital’s position as a pre-eminent destination for major sporting events.

In the capital, the Mayor has both the network and the influence to coordinate the work of key partners/stakeholders in sport and cross-sectorally, to ensure alignment and consolidation of priorities, systems and processes in a time of crisis and recovery.

The breadth of his remit enables the Mayor of London to support, through sport, key areas in the wider public health agenda, in particular mental health and serious youth violence. In this paper, evidence is given of the efficacy of this work as well as some of the areas which have proved more challenging – such as embedding diversity in sport, and capacity-building within communities – and which have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Executive Summary

Based on the evidence given in the body of this submission, the following actions are recommended. Government should:

1. Increase the level of funding available to sport in our communities, to:
 - reflect its crucial role in the wider public health agenda, and particularly outcomes associated with mental wellbeing and social connections;
 - support its transition and recovery from and sustainability beyond the Covid-19 crisis.
2. Review the transparency and effectiveness of core funding provision to sport governing bodies and other partners such as the County Sport Partnerships – including:
 - revisiting the recommendations of #CSPFUTURE published in 2016;
 - allowing direct strategic co-investment in other bodies whose priority outcomes align with those of *A Sporting Future* and *Towards An Active Nation*.
3. Establish a commission to tackle longstanding issues of structural racism in sport.
4. Provide clear leadership and support in the co-ordination of facilities for sport and physical activity, including existing under-used community sport assets and schools facilities for wider use by local communities.
5. Introduce a Sports Recovery Fund based on the London Community Response Fund collaborative operating model and incorporating support for a ‘Funder Plus’ approach to organisational development.
6. Invest in workforce training, development, support and recognition needs, as well as organisational capacity building in the community sport sector.
7. Support and input into a coalition approach to collective impact measurement for the community sport sector, serving a range of needs and audiences and informing standardisation both nationally and across other cities worldwide.
8. Facilitate partnerships between elite sports clubs and lower league/grassroots to deliver community initiatives – helping to harness the power of players at academy and professional level alongside elite club’s community foundations.
9. Support national governing bodies to coordinate (9) above, as they are best placed to understand the needs of the lower league clubs and the potential of elite clubs.

Detailed Response

1. Are current sports governance models fit for purpose?

1.1 Despite advances in recent years in Home Nation commitment to the principles of good governance in sport¹, many aspects – especially ***promoting diversity and working towards a state of gender parity*** – have proved challenging.

¹ October 2016: Sport England and UK Sport published *A Code for Sports Governance*, with code compliance a condition of future funding (also Sport Scotland’s corporate plan *Raising the Bar*, Sport Northern Ireland’s publication *Sport Matters*, and Sport Wales’ continued commitment to the *Governance and Leadership*

1.2 The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on certain population groups (coinciding with Black Lives Matter protests) has shone a light on longstanding **inequalities of access and opportunity at all levels of sport**: ‘... Disparities [are] evident from early life, where in England 38% of black children are defined as ‘less active’, compared with 29% of white children, despite having more positive attitudes towards activity ... [these disparities go] right through to elite sport and the boardroom.’² This submission gives evidence of such inequalities in London’s community sport sector, as highlighted by the work of the Mayor’s *Sport Unites* investment programme³ and his sport team’s wider engagement with the sector.

1.3 The Covid-19 pandemic has been referred to as a ‘stress test’ showing up ‘glaring deficiencies in our systems at international, national, sub-national, community and household level’⁴. Many are now advocating for sports governance to use the pandemic as a **catalyst for reform and transformation**, including democratic processes and transparency in leadership and decision-making and validated and accountable institutions⁵.

1.4 Inequalities of access to community sport is stark amongst the most vulnerable population groups. Findings from London Sport’s recent conference ‘Active London’ state that nationally, there was a 10.3% increase from March to May 2020 in the number of disabled people who did less than 30 minutes of exercise a week; an 8.1% rise amongst older adults (55+); and a 9.2% increase amongst young people (16-34). Further underscored during the conference was the **importance of educational settings, community leisure facilities and team sports** in underpinning access to activity across England.

1.5 ‘Access to sport’ is a multi-faceted issue spanning physical, economic, cultural and other factors that may only be understood and addressed at a local level. Sport programmes that are **embedded in and trusted by the community** are well placed for connectivity, flexibility, rapid response and effective collaboration. Facilities are however key: Londoners have been less active, and have had fewer opportunities to be active, during lockdown, as many reside in small homes without access to outdoor space. ‘Digital poverty’ compounds the issue around online support and adapted services offered by the community sport sector. Many Londoners cannot travel far to take part in sporting activity due to Covid-19 restrictions, as well as other factors; hyper-localised provision highlights inequalities between London Boroughs, where some are better resourced or equipped to support residents in being active.

1.6 There is a call to ‘reconceptualise sport as consisting of several dimensions with differing outcomes (sport for development and peace, sport for all, sport development and elite sport provision) along one single continuum – interlinked and working together’⁶. The

Framework for Wales)

² <https://www.sportsthinktank.com/news/2020/06/britains-sporting-apartheid-must-end-says-sport-englands-chris-grant>

³ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/sports/sport-unites>

⁴ Address to the United Nations, Dr Mohammed Arabiat from Generations for Peace

⁵ Sugden & Sugden, 2020

⁶ Keane, 2020

Mayor of London's Major Events Engagement Fund is an attempt to **bring elite sport provision in line with local community needs** – with programmes designed to encourage participation in sport and to address certain 'development' issues linked to the social outcomes priorities of *Sport Unites*⁷. There is a need for reflection, and consideration of reform, at all levels of sport, from the highest of elite competition to the most grassroots, to ensure systems are targeted, equitable, efficient, supportive, and resilient along the entire continuum.

- Government should review of the transparency and effectiveness of core funding provision to sport governing bodies and other partners such as the County Sport Partnerships – including (i) revisiting the recommendations of #CSPFUTURE published in 2016⁸; and (ii) a consideration to allow direct strategic co-investment in other bodies whose priority outcomes align with those of *A Sporting Future* and *Towards An Active Nation*. Devolved governments and Local Authorities will be vital in supporting the recovery of the sport sector; government should ensure funding is available for local government effectively to deliver this support.
- We would further welcome and support the establishment of a commission, as recommended by Sport England Board member Chris Grant⁹, to tackle longstanding issues of structural racism in British sport.

2. At what level of sport should the government consider spending public money?

2.1 Community sport's contribution to the wider public health agenda is well established beyond the provision of activities to encourage participation for physical health gains. The intentional use of sport in communities achieves **positive social, health and economic outcomes for targeted populations**. Sport development ensures not only talent identification and pathways to elite performance, but also personal growth in life- and career-enhancing skills such as leadership and communication. In England, every pound spent on community sport and physical activity generates a social return on investment of £3.91¹⁰. It is the role and responsibility of central government primarily to invest in community sport.

2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic has severely stressed the community sport sector and brought about reflection both on its resilience, and on its inherent value, in times of crisis and non-crisis. Whilst already fragile pre-pandemic as a result of cuts in local and national public service spending¹¹, lockdown-related **losses of income and increased costs associated with**

⁷ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/sports/sport-unites>

⁸ <https://www.wesport.org.uk/custom-content/uploads/2017/01/csp-appraisal-report.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.sportsthinktank.com/news/2020/06/britains-sporting-apartheid-must-end-says-sport-englands-chris-grant>

¹⁰ *Social & Economic Value of Sport and Physical Activity*, Sheffield Hallam University, September 2020

¹¹ *An Analysis of third-sector sport organisations in an era of super austerity*, Liverpool John Moores University, March 2018

adaptation have had a hugely damaging effect. Research conducted by Sported in July 2020 indicated that 1 in 4 community sport organisations would not survive beyond 6 months. 48.5% of London-based organisations supported under the Mayor's *Sport Unites* programme have anticipated 'going under' within 12 months of the onset of the crisis. Emergency grants and support for funding have been cited as the biggest sectoral support needs by both Sported and Street Games.

2.3 Despite evidenced financial need, organisational survival has not featured as the top issue across the community sport sector. The Sport for Development Coalition cites **mental wellbeing and social and community connections**¹² as the biggest (linked) concerns across differing demographic groups and organisations. Many sports organisations are the trusted point of contact for local people, facilitating positive interaction and integration within and across communities. 83% of young people have said the pandemic has made their mental health worse; they miss the structure and support provided by local sports opportunities¹³. It is difficult enough for organisations to support those population groups considered 'vulnerable or at risk' and who were already on the radar of support services; others most challenged by the current crisis are undoubtedly falling through the cracks.

3. What are the biggest risks to the long-term viability of grass-roots sport?

The following represents collated insight/evidence from *Sport Unites* stakeholders over the course of the programme, together with that resulting from wider engagement by the Mayor's sport team during the pandemic with individuals, small community groups and charities, and pan-London/national networks, governing bodies and local authorities. There is general consensus around the biggest risks to the sector as well as its most pressing needs.

3.1 Mental wellbeing (workforce and participants); social and community connections

- Community sport leaders report more than twice the anxiety levels amongst beneficiaries from the previous year, and 59% are most concerned about participants maintaining their wellbeing¹⁴. This chimes with Sport England's *Local Voices* research and with the GLA sport team's findings: wellbeing of participants and staff ranks 2nd below the risk of being unable to deliver activities (and so keep their funding) at all.
- Sport Unites grantees and other sector stakeholders have cited increased difficulty in managing mental health for those particularly isolated with certain conditions and impairments (those 'shielding'; those with physical disabilities and intellectual impairments, together with their families and carers). The curtailment of statutory

¹² *Impact of Covid-19 on the S4D Sector*, Sported, September 2020

¹³ Young Minds, 2020. 68% of young people have suffered significant decreases in normal physical activity levels during and in transition from lockdown. Community organisation Rackets Cubed reports marked drops in agility levels in the primary schools where they deliver since March and an estimated 3-6kg average weight gain March-September for 8-10 year olds, describing this as 'potentially catastrophic' for children's health and wellbeing

¹⁴ Community Pulse Surveys, Sported, 2020

services is causing many to struggle to maintain the support practices and routines that work for them.

- Some organisations have further reported anecdotally their young people being recruited by gangs as they exercised ('The kids are desperate to play, so the gangs take over the nets and courts'); break-ins into locked community facilities ('They cut the padlocks and play night-time games'); and unsafe spaces at home becoming more apparent and pressing ('I can't do another month at home with my dad').
- Lockdown has prevented or at least severely hindered personal interaction between sports leader and participants: in addition to the 'digital divide' that exists and exacerbates inequalities, online services bring additional safeguarding burdens and risks, and don't always serve to encourage confidential information-exchange or enable sensitive identification and support for those confronting difficult challenges.
- Amongst a reduced community sport workforce, the weight of social responsibility to their participants and the wider community is heavy and set only to increase as the pandemic endures. 1 in 3 Londoners have some involvement in the physical activity sector¹⁵ but skillsets of those in the community sport workforce traditionally still tend to lie in technical teaching/coaching rather in the 'softer skills' demanded by sport for social outcomes such as those tackled through *Sport Unites* investment: inactivity, poor mental health, loneliness and isolation, and serious youth violence.
- These skills – possessed by *people like me*; by those who are embedded in their local areas and know first-hand the challenges people face – are what enables the community sport workforce to engage those who are most in need in active participation to improve their lives, experiences and future opportunities.

3.2 **Widening inequalities** – as addressed above, in relation to governance.

3.3 **Funding gaps and financial sustainability**

- A total of 46.3% of *Sport Unites* supported delivery organisations either applied for, or received, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for their staff, with 35% placing more than half their workforce on furlough. 10% reported that they had to make redundancies. One organisation receiving funding from the GLA and Comic Relief to support refugees and asylum seekers has had to close. It is too early to assess take-up in the sector of the extended government furlough scheme and increased self-employed support.
- Significant numbers of *Sport Unites* grantees also accessed government assistance, including the business rates holiday scheme (31.1%), deferred VAT payments (18.4%); HMRC Time To Pay scheme (9.2%) or had taken out a government backed small business loan or grant (33.3%).

¹⁵ *Sport for all of us*, March 2018

- 35.1% of organisations reported that they had received a Covid-19 response fund grant, including Sport England’s Community Emergency Fund, the Charities Aid Foundation Coronavirus Emergency Fund, or the London Community Response Fund – a collaboration of London’s funders, providing co-ordinated financial support to groups responding to the needs of communities in the capital most affected by the pandemic. The majority (59.1%) reported that they did not receive any emergency funding.
- The needs of national governing bodies differ but many cite financial support to mitigate loss of income from membership fees, cancelled coaching courses, and postponed events. For those such as England Boxing – 50% of whose clubs are located in the country’s top 30% of areas of deprivation – the lack of activity combined with persisting fixed costs is hugely problematic. Many are waiving subscriptions to continue to support youngsters and their families most affected by Covid-19; but this is not sustainable and assistance is required to facilitate a safe, phased return to play and to conduct outreach to get people active, run anti-knife crime initiatives, and provide mental health support. For NGBs such as Swim England, who have extensive reliance on public facilities such as Council pools, the picture is even more bleak.
- Organisations with community assets such as football pitches and community hubs have reported a loss of income from these – and there has been a significant financial impact on SME’s who support the delivery of Major Sports Events in London. Should these smaller companies be forced to close, London would lose valuable knowledge and expertise in hosting world-class sport for economic benefit, international visibility, and community engagement.
- The campaign #SaveOurSports (now with more than 30k signatures) calls for government to introduce a sports recovery fund – similar to the Culture Recovery Fund – with targeted investment to assist the community sport sector in ‘building back better’ from Covid-19, including capital investment into facilities. This is in addition to VAT reduction to 5%, further business rates exemption for community clubs, and a Sports Betting Right to create a new income stream for investment into the sector. It further asks for the promotion of outdoor and indoor sport as much as possible within all future Covid restrictions, as being both key to physical and mental health and low risk in terms of transmission. The latter is backed up by data from ukActive, which cites that across 1,800 gyms/leisure facilities and 55m visits since re-opening, there have been 1.38 cases of the disease per 100,000 visits nationally¹⁶.

3.3 *Inconsistent messaging around restrictions / safe delivery of activity*

- Government was slow at communicating effectively to the sport sector as the Covid-19 threat increased, and **guidance has remained at times unclear and inconsistent** around how Londoners can take part safely in sport or physical activity whilst social distancing. This has persisted into ‘2nd lockdown’ with queries from delivery organisations about exceptions for ‘support groups’ and permissible activity within and outside school hours.

¹⁶ ukActive data November 2020

- Guidance on being active at home or exercising outdoors has not provided sufficient support for those with physical disabilities or learning impairments – and the latter struggle especially with navigating information imparted digitally.
- Community sport organisations have had to quickly adapt their programmes to virtual delivery, despite Covid-19 highlighting vulnerable groups such as refugees and asylum-seekers who face digital poverty at home and are unable to benefit. Service adaptation has brought additional safeguarding risks as well as placing additional demands on an already stretched volunteer and sessional workforce.
- There are success stories. **Leadership** has been provided in London via a series of interactive webinars run jointly with the Mayor’s Office and London Sport (April-August). Covering finance and funding; being active at home; leadership in crisis; mental health; children and young people, diversity, race and representation; disability and inclusion; and socially distanced sport. The events were attended by 677 individuals from a range of organisations including grassroot clubs and national governing bodies. 27% attended two or more sessions. The series was recorded and further disseminated to the sector subsequently; a further webinar will take place later in November to help tackle renewed or ongoing lockdown challenges.
- To explore ‘in real time’ **the challenges of delivering sport at social distance** (especially those activities involving an element of contact, such as football, basketball and netball), the Mayor funded the first ‘socially distanced sport pilot’¹⁷ in Hackney in July 2020. The project trialled a model for group work whilst observing Covid-19 government restrictions and PHE guidance. Experienced coaches and community group leaders facilitated the pilot in outdoor school sports facilities, but learnings are adaptable and suitable for non-school settings – and have been disseminated to the sector both as a general guide and a sport-specific toolkit adding value to that published by the sports’ respective national governing bodies.
- Despite the structural difficulties, many organisations have remained in contact with participants to **engage and support** them through the crisis. They have been creative and proactive in pivoting their offers to best address local need – for example, delivering food and medicine; providing ‘befriending’ telephone and welfare support for participants and the wider community; sending physical and digital education, active play and mentoring resources into households.
- 25% of Sport Unites grantees in March/April and 50% in June, noted that they were or planning to start providing online training for staff, volunteers, and in some cases, conducting non-active training and workshops for participants.
- 27% of organisations in March/April were working with partners and collaborating with other organisations, increasing to 50% by June/July . The most common reason for collaborating was to be able to continue to deliver activities to participants, and to try to

¹⁷ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/sports/sport-unites/key-projects/socially-distanced-sport-project>

recruit new ones. Within supporting best practice case studies, there is a commitment to formalising and maintaining such relationships post-pandemic.

3.4 **Access to facilities / venues for doing and delivering sport and physical activity**

- Venues for community sport are a huge challenge, especially at times when restrictions permit outdoor exercise only. Parks, if people can get to them, have experienced significant litter and hygiene problems, and closed-off areas that could be used by community groups, such as tennis courts, are over-subscribed; this exacerbates both actual and perceived inequalities. Leisure centres, sports clubs and community gyms when permitted to operate are confronted with capacity, resource and risk management challenges – and a changing landscape of guidelines which often cannot be easily trialled in ‘real time’.
- The Mayor’s socially distanced sport pilot (see above) tested a group-play model using selected secondary school playgrounds, prior to wider schools re-opening. School playgrounds offer ‘private’ open space and controlled access/use by a range of local groups of children and young people. The model was delivered by experienced local community leaders who can readily reach and are already trusted by their beneficiary cohorts. Evaluation has added value to NGB guidance for selected sports and aided PE departments in the introduction of socially distanced curriculum delivery.

- Based on the learnings from this, and findings from a current ‘Open Doors’ pilot funded by the Mayor in partnership with ukActive and Sported, government should lobby for increased support to – and buy-in from – schools that are able to open their facilities for wider use by the local community. The Premier League have approached ukActive about use of schools for some of their Kicks community sessions, as they are struggling to find places/spaces to deliver in the community.
- Overall, the co-ordination of facilities requires greater leadership from government. Many community sport assets could have been utilised to support crisis efforts, whilst generating crucial income opportunities for organisations.

4 **What key measures could the government introduce to increase the resilience of sports clubs and venues?**

4.1 As discussed elsewhere in this submission, **financial support** is required for the sector; and public spend is justified by community sport’s significant contribution to the wider national public health agenda. However, whilst emergency grant funding and other forms of centralised financial assistance have their place in crisis support and transition/recovery, this does not solve the longer-term issue of sectoral financial sustainability.

- There is a call from funders to look at current operating models and determine how they can work collaboratively. A prime example of successful **cross-sector co-funding** is the London Community Response Fund (LCRF)¹⁸ – a unique coalition of over 65 funders from
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across sectors, which has distributed more than £42m to date to London’s civil society organisations to groups in all 33 boroughs. The Mayor has invested more than £9m into the Fund. Shared intelligence and processes have enabled grants quickly to reach recipients most in need and ‘waves’ of the Fund have flexed to respond to an ever-changing landscape.

- Were the government to consider, for example, introducing a Sports Recovery Fund as referenced above, it could adopt a collaborative operating model such as the LCRF – drawing on its learnings and success to date in supporting the third sector and particularly sport in communities. This could also incorporate support for a ‘Funder Plus’ approach to organisational development, in order for the sector to become more resilient and sustainable.
- Investment into the sector needs to address workforce training, development, support and recognition; as well as organisational capacity-building that will enable the provision of enriched activity-based services that meet the specific needs of local communities.

4.2 In London, key sport sector stakeholders are exploring a ***coalition approach to impact measurement and management (IMM)***, through a common measurement framework, in order to more effectively demonstrate the impact community sport has on Londoners.

- Were government to support this process it could become a ‘test case’ for best practice in collective impact measurement – serving a range of needs and audiences and informing standardisation both nationally and across other cities worldwide.

4.3 Other key needs expressed by the sector include ***mental health and well-being support*** for the community sport workforce and training to allow them to better support their participants; ***support to deliver digitally***, where the pandemic has amplified the social divide, increasing the need for multiple methods of inclusion so that those within digital poverty are not left behind; and ***space and support for learning and innovation***, encouraging organisations to learn from each other and work creatively in collaboration.

5. To what extent should elite professional sports support the lower league and grassroots?

5.1 In his manifesto, the Mayor made a commitment to work with London’s elite football and sports clubs to expand their offer to young people. Lower league and grassroots clubs have great potential to positively impact their communities but are often under-resourced. Developing partnerships between professional sports clubs and grassroots sport is an important model: many professional clubs rely on grassroots and lower league clubs in developing talent pathways. There is a need for professional clubs to support the sustainability of grassroots clubs to ensure this talent pathway is viable.

5.2 The Mayor delivered a ground-breaking partnership between Arsenal FC, West Ham United FC and Crystal Palace FC to deliver the 'Football Unites' pilot. The pilot utilises the power of young players in elite academies to deliver projects with grassroots organisations in tackling serious youth violence. This pilot has resulted in a draft framework for how Premier League academies can enhance youth voice and collaborate with grassroots to deliver community impact.

5.3 It should be noted that some elite sports clubs also face new financial challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore any initiative that supports grassroots sport should aim to be mutually beneficial to the elite club as well as the grassroots beneficiary.

6. How should government make this happen?

- Government can facilitate partnerships between elite clubs and lower league/grassroots to deliver community initiatives. In particular these can harness the power of players at academy and professional level alongside elite club's community foundations.
- Government should support national governing bodies to coordinate this work, as they are best placed to understand the needs of the lower league clubs and the potential of elite clubs.
- City Hall welcomes the opportunity to share the learnings of the Football Unites pilot with government to develop frameworks for how elite clubs can work with grassroots – particularly to expand their offer to local communities.