

Local Government Association (LGA) – Written evidence (NPS0050)

1. About the Local Government Association (LGA)

- 1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We are a politically-led, cross-party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales.
- 1.2. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2. Summary

- 2.1. We are facing the biggest public health crisis in living memory. Physical activity and grassroots sport have an essential role in building individual resilience to the immediate challenge of COVID-19, but also in tackling the loneliness and obesity epidemics that pose a longer-term threat to our nation's health which have worsened during the pandemic. Grassroots and community sport also have a fundamental role in bringing communities together, promoting mixing of different groups in healthy competition, and as a positive activity for young people.
- 2.2. Local government can play a fundamental role in rebuilding the health of the nation and ensuring integrated communities. Councils are responsible for provision of, or supporting, both formal and informal opportunities for activities. They are responsible for a third of all swimming pools, 31 per cent of grass pitches; 13 per cent of sports halls; and almost of fifth of all health and fitness facilities. They spend over £1 billion per year on sport, leisure and green spaces, parks and playgrounds.
- 2.3. Leisure services are essential to public health and wellbeing, and to quality of life for individuals. They produce quantifiable and cashable savings to the NHS, with [East Riding leisure services moving from double the national average of bariatric operations to half the national average in 8 years, and saving the NHS £2.5 million in the process.](#)
- 2.4. Although councils currently spend over £1 billion per annum on sport, leisure and green spaces, parks and playgrounds, these services are discretionary. There is a real and immediate risk that many services will close. Already [some facilities are being closed](#) due to the immediate budget pressures from COVID-19, while as far back as 2017 the Housing, Communities and Local Government [Select Committee found that some councils had had to reduce parks budgets by 97percent over five years.](#) Unless local government, and its leisure providers, are put on a sustainable financial footing, we will experience a significant loss of amenity for the public with drastic consequences for public health and wellbeing.

- 2.5. Improving local delivery requires a joined-up approach at national level. While stronger cross-Government working is a feature of the Sporting Future Strategy 2015, it has not delivered on its ambition. A lack of ownership for strategic policy for sport and health outcomes at a national level causes challenges for councils and local partners when seeking to join up these initiatives in their local places. We recommend a strategic partnership between Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and local government is established better join up national and local systems.
- 2.6. Through their leisure services, parks, transport responsibilities, and public health teams, as well as their support for myriad grassroots groups and clubs, councils have an essential role to play in supporting the nation to be active. Their role must be central to any new national plan for sport and recreation. However, the current financial situation for local government threatens existing partnership working and delivery.
- 2.7. The budget decisions being made now leading to the closure or mothballing of facilities do not reflect councils' ambition for their communities or their recognition of the benefits of these services to their communities. We must ensure they are able to continue their essential work for communities.
- 2.8. Over the period of the pandemic, existing inequalities have worsened and those experiencing digital inequality have been particularly affected. By offering affordable or free access to a variety of physical activity options, councils will be crucial to supporting communities through the post-pandemic recovery.

3 How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

- 3.1 There are a range of actions which could be taken to improve local delivery, beginning with a joined up, strategic national framework that could align local partners and the public sector towards a joint effort. Currently, there is fragmentation and a lack of ownership for strategic policy for sport and health outcomes at a national level, which inevitably causes challenges when councils and local partners seek to join up these initiatives in their local places.
- 3.2 We recommend that a strategic partnership between DCMS and local government is established to tackle fragmentation at national and local level. A strategic partnership would deliver the following improvements:
- 3.2.1 Create a forum to discuss areas of greatest need and priority areas of investment across a range of departmental areas
- 3.2.2 Help unify disparate government funding streams from a range of departments with different timescales, application processes, and

reporting requirements, to allow targeted, joined up investments that maximises investment while minimising bureaucracy

3.2.3 Enable all partners – central and local government, private sector, charities and voluntary sector – to contribute their unique expertise and perspectives towards an agreed objective.

3.3 The LGA, Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE), and the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA), are taking steps to help shift work into a strategic context. We are collaborating on a new [vision for public leisure](#), which will explore the unique role for public leisure, as opposed to the voluntary, charitable or for profit sectors. Launched at our recent [‘Reimagining the future of public leisure’ conference](#), this work will align with Sport England’s new strategy and support councils in their understanding of the benefits that public leisure can offer to their communities. It will build on the discussions that have already taken place among council leaderships about their leisure provision.

3.4 While councils, Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts and the voluntary sector already collaborate on key initiatives¹, we need to further support them to understand systems thinking and the role they can play to influence and shape the system – predominantly health systems, but also economic – so that the importance of physical activity is recognised and invested in.

3.5 Local training would also lead to improvements in delivery. We have already had success through our collaboration with Sport England - a leadership development programme for strategic sports and activity leads (officers and elected members) which helps them to understand and navigate the complex landscape, including health systems. Drawing on learning from local areas, including Sport England’s [Local Delivery Pilots](#), it brings together leads in councils, provider Trusts, and Active Partnerships to give them a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities, enabling closer working relationships in their local areas. This work should be continued and expanded further.

3.6 The work of Sport England’s Local Delivery Pilots have also been making important contributions in this space, as has the National Heritage Lottery Fund’s [Future Parks Accelerator Programme](#) and [the Childhood Obesity Trailblazers](#) delivered by the LGA for Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE). This work should be continued, but also brought together for a shared discussion on learning with government departments, including Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), DCMS, DHSC and Department for Transport (DfT).

¹ Our [‘Active People, Healthy Places’](#) report outlines how councils have redesigned their in-house leisure services and worked with partners to improve delivery of physical activity goals. For instance, Wirral Council’s offer involves over 400 sports clubs that use council facilities, schools and colleges, community groups, local businesses, the Wirral Tourism Network and training providers.

In Hackney, these partners include the voluntary and community sector, Age UK, Alzheimer’s Society, Sport England, Amateur Swimming Association, England Netball, England Squash, Lawn Tennis Association, Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust and the South East Commissioning Unit.

The LGA, Sport England and PHE have begun discussions on this and would be happy to facilitate this conversation.

- 3.7 The disparate and disconnected funding landscape remains a significant barrier to joined up working. There is no direct Government funding explicitly for public leisure, although councils are able to bid against other organisations for Sport England funding for additional activities and new facilities.
- 3.8 It remains a challenge to join up with external health organisations and sometimes the voluntary sector, with Government grant programmes sometimes making this more complicated. For instance, the recent Thriving Communities fund from the National Academy for Social Prescribing unhelpfully excludes councils from building on their existing work in this area and fulfilling their usual leadership role within a place.
- 3.9 Overall, Government funding where it is available is frequently fragmented and accompanied by bureaucratic and burdensome bidding processes. A National Plan for Sport and Recreation, or a refresh of Our Sporting Nation, could help improve this by requiring and reminding departments of the need to work collaboratively across Government.
- 3.10 The cost of not doing so is clear. Our [Fragmented funding report](#) reveals that councils had seen significant reductions in core funding from government over the last decade and were facing a funding gap of £6.5 billion by 2024/25. Now – dealing with the financial impact caused by extra costs, loss of income, and cash flow pressures – [councils will need at least £2 billion more to meet the full financial impact of the pandemic in 2020/21](#). This is placing serious and ongoing pressures on local services.
- 3.11 This results in councils, the voluntary sector and other partners having to spend significant sums on developing bids for the funds, often competing against each other, and sometimes almost outweighing the value of the grant that might be received. This diverts energy away from frontline delivery.
- 3.12 It does not have to be this way. [The Football Foundations' approach to Local Football Facility Plans](#) promoted a collaborative approach to developing local investment plans to support pitches and facilities, including providing consultancy support to assist in their development. There is positive learning that could be adopted across Government.
- 3.13 Although Government funds are critical, there is another financial challenge facing the sport and recreational sector as a result of COVID-19. Most councils rely on sport, leisure and recreation services generating enough income to pay for themselves and, in the most successful cases, generate an additional return that can be used to subsidise other public services. This is why they have been so badly affected by the pandemic, as they have been unable to generate income while also having high running costs that could not be reduced while closed, for instance, filters on swimming pools must be kept running.

- 3.14 As a discretionary service, councils are having to make difficult choices about where their limited resources can go, with the legal obligations around statutory services making them a higher priority, although this does not reflect councils' views of the importance of leisure provision to their communities physical and mental wellbeing. But simply making leisure provision a statutory service would not resolve this; the overall financial sustainability of councils needs to be addressed.
- 3.15 Although councils have been creative at responding to these significant financial pressures and the need to protect statutory services, even statutory funding that could support leisure services has decreased significantly. For instance, a number of councils have taken steps to connect sports provision explicitly with their public health responsibilities and strategies, including integrating the leisure team and/or parks team in the Public Health Directorate. However, the public health grant has seen a £700 million funding reduction over the past five years.
- 3.16 This is despite the fact that every pound invested by Government in council-run services such as public health helps to relieve pressure on other services like the NHS and the criminal justice system, whilst also proving to be three to four times more cost-effective in improving people's health than money spent in the NHS. UKActive has also calculated that [the closing of gyms, leisure centres and swimming pools under COVID-19 restrictions is costing the NHS £7.25m a week](#) in lost social value. The figure has been calculated based on the loss of health interventions – physical and mental – normally offered by the sector. This includes the way the sector contributes to the reduction, through exercise, of numerous health conditions from stroke and cancer to Type 2 diabetes, dementia and depression. Significantly, two thirds of cancer prehab and rehab services are provided in leisure centres.
- 3.17 Unless and until these benefits are recognised at the national level and able to draw down cross-government funding in a manner that actively supports collaboration, rather than competition, the local landscape will continue to face significant barriers to joining up and improving delivery.

4. How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

- 4.1. The removal of many schools from local government oversight has introduced challenges for councils when it comes to working with schools, not least because of the number of different organisations that now exist. We would welcome a more structured conversation with the DfE about how to improve coordination in this area.
- 4.2. Councils do have tools that can promote activity among their population as a whole, and which will also benefit children and young people. For many people, it will be informal activity that is more attractive than organised sports or visiting a gym, and councils are working to design their communities to enable this. For instance, [Leeds City Council's Transport Strategy 2020 \(Slide 8\)](#) identifies three

overarching objectives – tackling climate change, delivering inclusive growth, and improving health and wellbeing. Physical activity, through active travel choices, appears as a key deliverable in both the climate change and improving health and wellbeing objectives.

- 4.3. Council parks and green spaces can similarly play a key role. [Natural England's People and Nature Survey](#) revealed that 62 per cent of the adult population visited a park or green space between April to June 2020, and adults with children living in their household were more likely to visit a natural space (65 per cent vs 56 per cent). By providing play facilities, skateboard and BMX parks, and integrating green spaces into active travel routes, councils are ensuring that residents are able to build in a green boost to their mental health, as well as enjoying opportunities to interact with nature and be active at the same time. Many councils will also support activities like parkrun and organise a programme of activities within their parks, many of which will be targeted at children and young people.
- 4.4. However, our [recent research into the impact of COVID-19 on parks](#) revealed that they had been badly affected financially due to limits on their income generation activities, and in their volunteer base who help maintain parks. This is in addition to the challenges previously identified by the [2017 Select Committee inquiry into the future of public parks](#). Youth services too have been significantly reduced to almost nothing. While Active Partnerships and the voluntary sector have moved to fill some of the gap, they also face major resourcing challenges. This leaves provision of out of school activities in a precarious and variable state across the country.
- 4.5. The [National Child Measurement Programme \(NCMP\)](#) has been an important route for engaging young people through schools, and a number of areas have used this to increase activity among children, including Slough Borough Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Calderdale Council. Initiatives like the [Daily Mile](#) are also instrumental in this, and often part of the NCMP.
- 4.6. Our members are enthusiastic about the possibilities of the UKActive campaign to open schools facilities during the school holidays. However, we must also recognise that school is not always seen as a positive place for some young people and that there will need to be opportunities outside of those environments if we are to support those young people to be active. For example:
 - 4.6.1. [East Riding of Yorkshire](#) funded by PHE is delivering the Elevate programme for primary aged children with a very bespoke approach, using play-based activities, to support children who suffer from low self-esteem and find it more difficult to express themselves and keep friends. The twenty-week programme helps children to explore emotions and learn coping mechanisms for everyday life.
 - 4.6.2. The council also run the Hut programme for primary and secondary aged young people. It is a special facility in Withernsea where

children and young people can play and be physically active freely, meet new friends and access informal support. The staff work in partnership to support a high proportion of young people who are very vulnerable.

4.7 Councils routinely highlight leisure activities for young people on their websites and good examples include the [London Borough of Haringey](#) and the [London Borough of Camden](#). Councils such as Leeds, Calderdale and Mole Valley are also working with a Sport England supported [open data initiative called OpenActive](#) which aims to make it easier for people to get information on local opportunities to be active.

4.8 It is critical that we also provide non-digital opportunities to access activities and that there is a diverse mix of affordable options for children, young people and families and that activities are accessible. For instance, some councils work closely with organisations like the [Active Communities Network](#) which uses sport as a pathway into education, training and employment. These targeted interventions make a real difference to those who are excluded from or unable to take advantage of more mainstream opportunities.

4.9 During the pandemic we have seen more families exercising together. As we move towards social recovery, we want to ensure that these informal and formal opportunities are maintained and embedded in new programming within council leisure facilities and parks. For example, ensuring family exercise opportunities are available and at times that suit families whose parents may have differing working hours such as shift or weekend working.

4.10 [Sport England has recently published two new reports](#) showing that activity levels were increasing during the autumn 2019 term but, as expected, this has dropped across the spring and summer 2020 terms due to disruption caused by the storms and the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.11 These reports highlight the breadth of the challenge facing the sport, physical activity and recreation sector in getting children and young people active following COVID-19 and the need for strong, local offers for children, young people and families and the sustainable resourcing to be able to deliver this. Opportunities however, also exist for example:

4.11.1 The [statutory requirement that all primary and secondary pupils must be taught Health Education](#) in all maintained schools, academies, pupil referral units and special maintained and academies by summer 2021 presents an opportunity to address the drop in physical literacy.

4.11.2 Joining up Government strategies such as active travel agenda, aims to significantly reduce England's rate of childhood obesity within the next ten years via the childhood obesity plan and guidance from the Chief Medical Office (CMO) on how much physical activity people should be doing with the wider local offer for sport and recreation.

4.11.3 Building on the gains made in walking, cycling and informal fitness through for example the active travel agenda and digital offers. Extending the Department for Transport (DfT) funding to local authorities for

Bikeability training for schoolchildren beyond 2020 especially given that COVID-19 will have disrupted these plans.

4.11.4 Using the forthcoming commonwealth games to encourage participation and create a legacy

4.12 However, we are concerned about the dismantling of PHE, particularly where its health improvement function will sit in the future, which is yet to be announced.

4.13 It is vitally important that the rich data collected by PHE and available to local authorities and partners is not lost and continues. Local authorities and public health professionals need high quality data to be able to make local decisions about the interventions that work best for their local communities.

5. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

5.1 A significant percentage of grassroots sports and clubs and a disproportionate proportion of disabled, BAME and lower income residents depend on council sport and recreation facilities. Councils are actively working to support and encourage these groups to be active, whether through offering discounted access to activities, or putting on activities that appeals to these specific groups.

5.2 Sport England's national campaigns such as This Girl Can and, more recently, We Are Undefeatable are proving extremely effective and support councils in their work. The availability of media and communications tools that are customisable by the local area have been particularly helpful.

5.3 It is vital that local authorities have high quality data to enable them to understand what the participation levels are from local communities particularly those from under-represented groups and from less affluent backgrounds and to engage with these groups to understand the barriers preventing them being active. Active Lives provides a core component of this, but there remain areas related to BAME and school usage (captured by DfE) that could benefit from further development. Councils are developing their own methodologies to support this work.

5.4 A good, but early, example of this is Walsall Council parks' service. As a result of public health funding, Walsall Council is using visitor counter data to assess the results of lockdown on visitor numbers. They have reported an increase in use of 40 per cent compared to the same period last year. The team want to understand the demographics of these visitors and whether they intend to continue to use the open spaces after lockdown. This is particularly significant because as many as 40 per cent of Walsall residents in the town centre do not have access to a garden. The data presents an opportunity to do further work in this area.

- 5.5 Councils are always thinking creatively about how to repurpose their estates in ways which encourage physical activity. For instance, [Sport England data found that 94 per cent of concluded planning applications](#) affecting playing fields resulted in improved or safeguarded sports provision. However, tackling health inequalities is complex and requires concerted, systematic action across multiple organisations to address the wider determinants of health such as income, education, access to green space and healthy food, the work people do and the homes they live in.
- 5.6 Since public health responsibilities transferred to councils in 2013, councils have been working with health bodies, community groups, and charities to address health inequalities, but during this time councils have faced significant financial challenges.
- 5.7 For instance, another initiative by [East Riding of Yorkshire Council](#) has [developed an innovative partnership between local GPs and its leisure centres](#) to make the most of social prescribing. The council has designed an IT system that allows GPs to book patients directly on to the exercise on-referral scheme and its award-winning Live Well programme to combat obesity. 79 per cent completed the programme and over half achieved at least a 5 per cent weight loss. It has also drastically reduced the number of bariatric surgery operations in the area – the most expensive type of operation for the NHS, demonstrating the real opportunity for system-wide savings.
- 5.8 However, public health funding reductions of £700 million over the past five years, coupled with the financial crisis facing the leisure sector as a result of loss of income due to COVID-19, will undermine what has already been achieved in this area.
- 5.9 Sustainable funding for the sector is needed to enable councils to take a long-term preventative approach to tackling the complex problem that is health inequalities. It is also important that we rethink and redesign our services if we are to support more people to be active. For instance:
- 5.9.1 [Birmingham's Active Wellbeing Society](#) have been at the forefront of this, removing practical barriers to participation, such as provision of sports bras for women, screened areas for exercise groups in parks, and securing places for local residents in marathons. This has led to enviable engagement rates, consistently engaging higher proportions of their BAME communities, their deprived communities, and children.
- 5.9.2 [Eastleigh Borough Council](#), through its commissioning process, is working with two outsourced providers to address key local challenges such as a large gap between male and female participation rates. There is also a drop-off in participation by boys and girls at around 11 years of age, so Eastleigh's leisure centre is offering targeted activities for that age group: under 16s (participation increased by 158 per cent in two years); 16-19 year olds (increased 112 per cent); older adults aged 60-plus (increased 34 per cent); black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (increased 225 per cent); disabled people (increased 225 per cent); women (increased 78 per cent).

6. *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

6.1 Broadly speaking the five priority outcomes defined by government are a positive step forward. The emergency response COVID-19 and impact on the leisure sector has of course changed the context in which we are now opportunity and this needs be reflected in any changes to the strategy which should also bring new opportunities to recognise the value of council led place-based decision-making

6.2 It is difficult to get a sense of how successful the Government has been in delivering the Sporting Future strategy because the reporting on outcomes has not been consistent, for example, only two annual reports have been published (in 2017 and 2018) and none published in the past two years.

6.3 Furthermore, the priorities set out in the DCMS's Single Departmental Plan do not reflect the five outcome priorities in the strategy. What is evident from the objectives set out in the plan is that sport policy is in the minority, being only four out of 62 objectives. In addition, there are only two out of 42 arm's length bodies supporting the DCMS sport agenda. This feels disproportionate when compared to other policy areas within the DCMS portfolio.

6.4 A significant proportion of the investment, including the Department for Transport's (DfT) bikeability funding for local authorities is coming to an end. While the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Levelling Up Funds have potential to provide at least some capital investment in infrastructure that supports both structured and informal activities, we are concerned about how local areas will be able to address physical inactivity without clear national strategies and external funding, particularly for revenue funding to keep any new infrastructure running. Government must ensure that these two new funds are overtly accessible to develop recreational and leisure infrastructure and services.

6.5 Sport England's imminent new strategy will hopefully help to address some of the challenges set out in this submission, but clarity over the status of the Sporting Future strategy and if it is still current policy would be helpful so as not to add to further fragmentation at the local level.

7. *Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?*

7.1 As the Active Lives surveys are still quite new, it may be prudent to reflect on what is being collected because habits have changed. For instance, individuals were more likely to participate in more informal types of physical activity as a result of the national lockdowns and social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.2 It is concerning that much of the data that reported on the strategy's KPIs and outcomes was due to be published in the 2019 annual report of the Sporting Future strategy but it has not yet been published.

7.3 There are opportunities to better cross-reference, or even integrate, with other Government surveys and data collections. For instance, Natural England's new People and Nature survey contains important information about people's informal activity in green spaces, along with a wealth of insight into the benefits that 'green activity' brings to people. Similarly, the Department for Transport collects data on active travel use, including the impact of cycling and walking schemes. All this information sits on disparate parts of Gov.Uk or other websites and is not analysed collectively to reveal patterns in effective interventions to promote activity. Undertaking that analysis would also offer an opportunity to bring these departments together to collaborate on shared outcomes.

7.4 Councils collect a range of local information about the use of their services, although there is limited scope to integrate this at a larger level, due to differences in methods. Most will use the health-based Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to understand their demographics and any targeted work that could be done. This can lead to, for example, discounts for specific parts of the community that the council wants to encourage to be active. [APSE's regular State of the Market survey](#) perhaps captures this best, revealing 95% of responding councils offered discounts to the over 60s, and 66% to the unemployed, revealing public leisure's crucial role in filling gaps for the most economically disadvantaged that the private sector will not cover. The survey also reveals the increasing collaboration with health bodies, with 66% of respondents being commissioned by their Health and Wellbeing Board to deliver GP referral services.

7.5 While there are opportunities to improve local data collection, any new requirements on councils to collect and report data must be fully assessed and funded if it constitutes a new burden on local government.

8. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

8.1 Local government is wholly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, reflecting the communities it serves. It's vital that local government, communities and wider partners from health, voluntary and community sectors are all a part of the much-needed conversation on how we can all confront and end discrimination in sport.

8.2 The [LGA has updated its Equality Framework for local government](#). It demonstrates three different levels organisations need to achieve to reach best practice for meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty which local government must demonstrate due regard to.

8.3 The purpose of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) remains to help organisations, in discussion with local partners including local people,

review and improve their performance for people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010.

8.4 By using the EFLG organisations can also be helped to deliver on the public sector equality duty (PSED). Organisations using the guidance for self-assessment are likely to reference other locally appropriate characteristics evidenced as suffering inequality (other than those mentioned in the PSED).

8.5 The EFLG continues to encourage local adaptation with a focus on local issues and problems, and prompts learning from, and the spreading of, good practice.

9. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation activities at all levels?

9.1 It is positive that the Government's Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, which identifies an organisation's statutory safeguarding responsibilities now includes sports.

9.2 In England, local authorities that provide services for children (including sport, culture and leisure services) have responsibilities to ensure what they do factors in the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Operators who've been contracted by the local authority to manage facilities on their behalf share these safeguarding responsibilities.

9.3 There is a potential risk when a leisure trust provider fails and unexpectedly hands the contract back to the council that this could result in a lack of knowledge by the council with regards to the safeguarding and care of duty standards that need to be implemented in a sport, culture and leisure environment as many councils do not have inhouse expertise. The LGA will promote and share information to councils on safeguarding and duty of care standards for these services.

10. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.

10.1 Elite professional sports have a key role in supporting the lower leagues and grassroots. This support needs to be a mix of the financial, leadership, and training support. Many sports already have positive work and contributions in place, but this is not always proportionate to the sums of money involved in some of the sports. For example, the second Sporting Future annual dashboard report showed that between 2016 and 2017 only one new sport governing body met the [Sport and Recreation Alliance's Voluntary Code to reinvest 30 per cent of their net UK television broadcasting revenues in grassroots sport](#), this brought the total up to seven in 2018.

- 10.2 While finance is a crucial form of support, there is a key role to be filled in terms of leadership. That includes representing the diverse nature of participants sport at the most senior level. Senior figures and national ambassadors can play a key role in encouraging new participants to sports, and it is crucial that this encouragement extends to and resonates with some of our least active communities.
- 10.3 Where funding is provided, it is critical that this is done in partnership with local councils, who know their communities best, and are responsible for much of the crucial infrastructure. For instance, we welcome the Football Foundation's work to help communities improve their local football facilities. Over the last 19 years, it has delivered sports projects worth over £1.5 billion into local communities across the country, changing lives through football and more recently has worked with councils to develop Local Football Facility Plans. We would like to see continued and increased investment in grassroots football, aligned with the local approach of the facility plans.
- 10.4 The Lawn Tennis Association has similarly made available support and technology to help councils sustain local facilities in a socially distanced world, on top of their regular investments in local tennis facilities.
- 10.5 Despite these positive examples, there is no doubt that a stronger collaboration between elite and grassroots sport would be beneficial to our communities. Government could encourage this by placing less of an emphasis on elite sport, to the exclusion of grassroots sport. For instance, Government's sport working group, established to support recovery after Covid-19, almost exclusively focuses on elite sport provision. Grassroots activities and supporters' clubs need to be effectively represented in Government and able to engage with DCMS. That is not the case at the moment.

11. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

- 11.1 It would be helpful for the following recommendations to be underpinned by a national plan, which will need to put the role of councils at the center of its delivery. It is important that it dovetails with the new Sport England strategy and existing work to prevent further fragmentation and confusion at local level.
- 11.2 The [sporting infrastructure depended on by community sports is ageing](#), with Sport England estimating that 63 per cent of main sports halls and 60 per cent of swimming pools are past their expected lifespans or overdue refurbishment. It's therefore crucial the Government invests in this infrastructure to increase resilience for sports clubs and venues.
- 11.3 This does not mean all of these assets need replacing like for like. Instead, it is vital to work with communities to design the leisure centres, sports pitches, parks and other infrastructure that will best meet their needs and enable them to build activity into their lives. This could also mean realising the potential for new facilities to revitalise the high street, be co-

located with other facilities to form wellbeing or community hubs, and ensuring they meet the latest environmental standards for energy efficiency.

- 11.4 Sport England has been providing effective support and investment in infrastructure, but their funds are oversubscribed with 1,054 bids submitted to a grant fund that could only make 151 grants. Had Sport England been able to fund those bids, it would have unlocked match funding worth at least £540 million from councils and partners. During its operation, the fund typically achieved a 30 per cent reduction in capital build cost and a 40 per cent improvement in efficiency averaging £500,000 saving per annum per facility.
- 11.5 Sport England has a critical funding role in supporting community sports activity, and its budgets must be protected for the future. However, council funding is equally critical either as match funding to unlock investment from other funders, or to support small scale activity or equipment purchases by community groups that do not have the expertise to bid to national groups. While there has already been a very extensive squeeze on the availability of these funds from councils, the situation is expected to worsen over the next few financial years. This will create a double impact on groups who have lost their own opportunity to generate income through memberships, and who may now be faced with the loss of their council grant.
- 11.6 Where leisure services and clubs survive the three national lockdowns, it will take longer than a year for them to recover. Therefore, we are calling for long-term sustainable funding for these services. The challenges upon reopening include potential decline in customer demand and ongoing social distancing measures and the wider economic impact on people's disposable income. Upon reopening, operating costs will remain constant, but income will be significantly reduced. We recommend that:
- 11.6.1 the Government launches a national campaign to increase customer confidence in using gyms, leisure centres, swimming pools and to highlight the health and wellbeing benefits of physical activity and encourage individuals to start /reengage with sport activities. This will in turn increase income generation for local clubs and leisure services as well as creating a healthier nation and tackling health inequalities.
 - 11.6.2 Long-term government economic support for leisure and sport services is provided, by potentially extending some of the current business support such as VAT reduction that has been applied to other DCMS sectors.
 - 11.6.3 That utility providers provide short-term relief on utility charges in a similar way to banks who have provided mortgage holidays for those facing hardship, this will be particularly important as we face a second and potentially further national and regional lockdowns.
 - 11.6.4 That the strategic partnerships work together to develop high quality data which clearly shows the benefits of investing in sport, leisure, parks and green spaces; so that councils, leisure and sports services can demonstrate to wider partners from health, planning, transport, social care etc the value and contribution these services can make to wider agendas.

29 January 2021