

Active Partnerships – Supplementary written evidence (NPS0098)

Lee Mason, Chief Executive.

Please find attached a response of behalf of Active Partnerships, the charitable body that represents and supports the nationwide network of 43 Active Partnerships across England. The network adopts a collaborative whole system approach to create the conditions for an active nation, tackling inequalities and using the power of sport for and physical activity to transform lives. Active Partnerships play an important role in supporting the delivery of Government and Sport England strategies and programmes in ways that meet local needs, in partnership with Local Authorities and other local partners. We work across large parts of the sport and physical activity landscape, as well as multiple other sectors where sport and physical activity can support wider social outcomes.

We welcomed the opportunity to give oral evidence to the committee and to provide this follow up written evidence as a local perspective on the themes outlined in the inquiry.

1. 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?

1.1 There is a vast, diverse and dynamic network of provision for sport and physical activity locally. In a typical Active Partnership area there will be around 2000 sports clubs, 500 schools and 100's of facilities and providers, not to mention many more informal opportunities. This comprehensive network of provision and the paid and volunteer workforce which create it should be celebrated.

1.2 In addition, Active Partnerships are increasingly working with a whole range of organisations beyond our sector who work with our target audiences or can influence how active people are. Health and social care providers, housing associations, local authority departments voluntary & community organisations to name a few.

1.3 The Active Partnerships were originally created to help coordinate and support this network, acting as the 'glue' and brokering partnerships especially amongst the key agencies locally – Local authorities, NGBs, health bodies and facilities etc. They have a good overview of their area so can be a go to organisation for anyone wanting help to make connections, and they all have activity finders on their web sites to help people see what is available.

1.4 However rather than trying to organise all of this we increasingly think of it as building a social movement, embracing this diversity and enabling all parts of the local system to maximise their contribution to getting people more active.

1.5 In terms of how it could be improved;

- a. Despite efforts over recent years, as a sector we still haven't resolved the use of technology and open data to make sharing of opportunities better and more efficient.
and
- b. We are starting to see a more place-based approach from government and sport England, and this should be encouraged and further developed.

2. 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.

2.1 There is much good practice and numerous successful interventions taking place across the country to encourage children and young people to be active and participate in sport including some schools use of the Primary PE & Sport Premium and Satellite clubs organised by Active Partnerships and others which provide high quality clubs in a wider range of activities to target the least active children.

2.2 Nevertheless, children's activity levels remain far below the CMO recommended levels and there is a need for radical and significant policy change to create the scale and sustainability of change needed.

2.3 Clearly children spend a large amount of their time at school and there is much potential to increase levels of activity within and around the school day. The Healthy Active Schools framework developed by Yorkshire Sport Foundation is an excellent example of a tool which could support all schools to adopt best practice and could be rolled out much more widely.

2.4 We would strongly advocate for government to create an Extended school day – as recommended by former Children's commissioner and the wider sector – this is a win-win – childcare for working parents, opportunities to engage all young people with a broader range of experiences, make better use of school facilities and create a demand the sport and other cultural sectors can respond to.

2.5 In a similar vein, the Opening school facilities project we have been working on recently with DfE, is showing there is potential for more schools to open their sporting facilities more with an attractive offer designed to meet the needs of their students and the wider community. This work could be scaled up with operational support and funding provided to schools. This should sit in a wider policy context which encourages schools to be more outward looking playing an active role at the heart of their community as many schools do.

3. 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.

3.1 WHO recommend in their [Global Action Plan for Physical Activity 2018-2030](#) that 'Effective implementation will require bold leadership combined with cross-government and multisectoral partnerships at all levels to achieve a coordinated, whole-of-system response.'

3.2 Through our recent work we have reached the same conclusion, that there is no silver bullet, policy, partner or programme that will tackle the complex challenge of tackling inactivity, the inequalities within this, and the multiple factors that affect people's activity levels. In recognition of this, in recent years, we have worked with Sport England to explore a collaborative place based, whole system change approach, building a social movement to create the conditions for an active nation.

3.3 This system change approach needs to take place both nationally and locally, and so would like to see this approach taken forward as a deliberate national strategy, encouraged and facilitated by government and national agencies, with long term commitment, driving collaboration across government, national and local partners.

3.4 This highlights the need for all government departments to be engaged in helping the nation to be more active, recognising the links and contribution it makes to their outcomes and agendas.

3.5 We recognise that spaces and places one of the most important conditions in influencing people's ability to be active, with active environments clearly becoming an increasing priority across the country, and a good example of where cross government approaches are needed as we need the support of planners and the planning system and housing colleagues to ensure active design, transport to enable active travel. We are seeing many APs working to open up less traditional places such as empty shops, community halls and school facilities in order to provide safe local spaces where people can be active. Of

course, this links to the climate change agenda and creating environmentally and liveable neighbourhoods. The connection between physical activity and the environment could be stronger and is perhaps an opportunity.

3.6 There is often a lack of access to these facilities in the most deprived areas, so Active Partnerships are increasingly working with communities in those areas with an asset-based approach, focussing our efforts where need is greatest, as set out in the Marmot reports.

3.7 Whilst equality has always been at the heart of what we and many other local partners are about, we all haven't done enough. However, there is lots of work going on here and the conditions around us have shifted - COVID-19, the focus on health inequalities and black lives matter have created an environment where there is a real opportunity to finally focus on it and embed it in everything we do.

3.8 The Sport England Tackling Inequalities Fund has been a welcome radically new approach – using Active partnerships and other partners to reach groups who work with target groups, who typically wouldn't connect with Sport England or even consider their role in getting people more active. This has come as a result of Covid but there is an opportunity to continue this approach.

4. 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?

4.1 The Sporting Future strategy and the refocus of government policy and investment into sport and physical activity on the listed outcomes was widely welcomed. However, the implementation of this policy has been inconsistent. There appears a lack of clarity on what the core (and shared) purpose is, including an ongoing tension between delivering against these outcomes, or focusing on physical activity levels and numbers, or of involvement and development of sport and recreation, each of which may require focus on different groups, activities, partners and interventions.

4.2 We do think this can be resolved in a purpose which recognises that to increase activity levels requires a whole system approach which seeks to affect the multiple influences on people's activity levels and ability to engage in sport. To do so we need the support of a range of people and organisations outside the sector, making physical activity everyone's business, in physical and mental health and social care, community development and safety, economic development, children's services, the environment, and place shaping - and which requires a more explicit focus on the contribution physical activity can

make to a range of outcomes that they may be pursuing. We need national and local agencies working together and using their respective levers to break down barriers, find solutions and effect change. And to embrace the diversity of our wonderful ecosystem of activities and sectors and have a concerted effort to reframe 'sport' for the breadth of what this includes and the positive impacts it has for individuals and society. This should be driven by shared accountability and collective impact approaches.

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

5.1 The Active Lives Children and Young People and adult surveys are world leading and provide comprehensive data, critically at local level as well as national level.

5.2 The weakness at the local level is the sample sizes, and this could be significantly improved for the children's survey by Government encouraging all schools to take part in the survey, which would also provide useful insight and data to schools themselves and to share with parents, increasing accountability at all levels.

5.3 There is data that is currently under-utilised. For example, schools are required to report on national curriculum outcomes including PE and swimming, but this is not routinely undertaken nor reported by government. The Active Lives CYP survey could help with this.

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

6.1 These are long term, complex and systemic issues that require sophisticated, long term and multi-faceted and system-based solutions.

6.2 As a network we have recently been undertaking a concerted effort to establish how we might play a stronger role in tackling racial inequalities and racism in sport and physical activity which could provide a blueprint for our work in other areas. We have taken time to learn and educate ourselves of the issues, building confidence and a real determination and commitment to go further than we have before, and identify actions that maximises the potential reach and influence of our network. This work is in the early stages, but there may be learning for others and if the whole sector took a similar approach, encouraged by Government, with a long-term commitment, we could make a significant collective impact.

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

7.1 Active Partnerships have played an important but not widely recognised role in safeguarding throughout England over the last 20 years. Whilst NGBs and other organisations rightly lead safeguarding standards in their sport or activities, the Partnerships play an important role locally, providing training and guidance to drive up standards and representing the sector in supporting Local Safeguarding Boards.

7.2 We would support the recommendation in the Duty of Care in Sport Review to establish an Ombudsman. This gives meaningful scrutiny at all levels of the work of sports bodies in relation to safeguarding.

7.3 We feel it is important to address the Position of trust loophole making Coaches subject to the current legislation on Breach of trust [Protecting 16-and 17-year-olds from sexual abuse | NSPCC Learning](#)

7.4 Require LA safeguarding boards to engage proactively with local sports bodies, ideally the Active Partnership, to ensure awareness, coordination and compliance with local procedures.

8. 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.

NA

9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

NA

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

10.1 The current Sporting Future strategy was certainly seen as positive, particularly the Government commitment and importance it signalled, the cross-government approach advocated and the focus on the outcomes that sport delivers.

10.2 However, any strategy needs the resources, accountability and people to drive it forward.

10.3 The scope and purpose of any such strategy would need to be clearly defined. It is useful for Active Partnerships and local partners to have a national strategy to provide guidance, direction and a shared purpose for our collective work, particularly to address the systemic challenges that need to be addressed both locally and nationally. Any such strategy should adopt a whole system, place based approach rather than a 'top down' strategy. However, Sport England have recently launched a new 10-year strategy, which to some degree fulfils this purpose, and so any further national strategy could confuse and so it would need to be clear how the two would work together.

10.4 a national government strategy might be helpful if it focussed on and galvanised government level interventions across the whole of government, had such accountability and resourcing. Alternatively, it may be more important to establish cross government commitment/vision/shared purpose for physical activity, with mechanisms to ensure this is embedded within each department strategies, policies and investments.

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