

Written evidence submitted by StreetGames

Response to the DCMS Inquiry on Covid-19

StreetGames is a national sports charity that champions and supports a network of over 800 locally trusted organisations (LTOs) providing access to sport, physical activity and volunteering to children, young people and families in the most disadvantaged and left-behind communities in England. These organisations are a crucial part of the social fabric of their neighbourhoods and often have multiple primary purposes. Their success is founded upon their ability to directly engage with children, young people and their wider community at a neighbourhood level. LTOs provide hyperlocal access to services and activities that improve the lives of local people across a range of outcomes including physical and mental wellbeing, increasing skills and employability, reducing youth crime and antisocial behaviour and contributing to cohesion. Much of their usual day-to-day work relies upon face-to-face contact with members of their community and the use of word of mouth to share opportunities.

StreetGames provides a range of support to LTOs including assistance with fundraising and sustainability; workforce development including training for coaches, leaders and volunteers and the development of insight-based approaches to increasing activity levels and reducing inactivity among the LSEG population. We want disadvantaged young people and communities to be healthier, safer and more successful through sport, physical activity and volunteering.

What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

Organisations and activities within the StreetGames network have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and lock down period.

StreetGames Area teams have made direct contact with staff at LTOs via phone and email so that individual voices can be heard and relevant support can be tailored to individual needs.

Over a four-week period during late March and early April **conversations have taken place with over 260 LTOs.**

These conversations have highlighted, that in terms of immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector:

- **Around one quarter/one third of LTOs in our network have had to stop their operations and engagement** – for example where an LTO operates out of a youth centre, community centre or leisure centre and that centre has been closed and all staff have been furloughed. Meaning that they are currently not able to provide any activities or support for the young people and communities they usually engage with.
- Of those remaining – **many have had to change the ways they connect with young people from face-to-face** engagement at doorstep sport sessions to using **online methods** and phone calls. For example:
 - Engaging young people online - providing support, advice and general activities such as quizzes or group activities
 - Providing online activities (or sign-posts) to help young people to be physically active at home

- Providing one-to-one support/mentoring – mainly over the phone.
- Many LTOs have **altered staff (and volunteer) work programmes** so that instead of delivering doorstep sport sessions they are:
 - Helping to provide direct support and/or assist with wider community responses linked mainly around getting food parcels and equipment to vulnerable families.
 - Helping to provide physical activity sessions within local schools that are open for the children of key workers.

See below for a range of examples.

Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions has also impacted the sector in **terms of issues related to funding and sustainability**. Many of the LTOs we have spoken to are concerned about their future finances – due to reductions in income and still having to pay rent and salaries.

They are also concerned about their staff – some have been had to be furloughed, whilst casual coaches and leaders have had their hours reduced or cancelled, leaving many without income.

LTOs are also concerned about the young people they engage with / their communities – in particular they have voiced:

- Concerns about the wellbeing of the young people they usually engage
- Concerns around some of the young people they usually engage missing out on access to positive role models
- Concerns around isolated females – particularly some that are known to be in violent relationships and being able to stay in contact with them.
- Concerns about some of the young people they engage not abiding by the lockdown restrictions and continuing to congregate in outdoor areas.
- Concerns about the young people and their families being able to ‘join in’ with online activities – some don’t have access to the internet, some share one device with siblings and parents and some don’t have any ‘private’ space to be physically active at home.

These additional concerns around the health and well-being of the young people they engage come on top of long standing disparities which exist across socio-economic groups. For example:

- The latest [Active Lives Survey](#) data showed that whilst there was an overall increase in the proportion of adults aged 16+ that were ‘active’ in the 12 months prior to the Coronavirus Pandemic:
 - There was no change in activity levels amongst adults from lower socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 6-8) which are still significantly lower (54%) than adults from the highest socio-economic groups - (72%) (NS-SEC 1-2); and
 - There has been a decline amongst young people aged 16-34 years compared to 12 months ago.

Similarly, we know that one in ten young people aged 11-15 has a diagnosable, emotional, behavioural or hyperactivity disorder – with socio-economics skewing this statistic: disadvantaged teenagers experience mental disorders at three times the rate of their better off peers.

LTO Examples - Engagement & Support for young people & Communities

Examples of how LTOs are now operating during the Coronavirus Pandemic /Lockdown

- 'We will be **delivering food** to those families who need the most. This a project we are working with Creation Trust Franco will prepare healthy food that can be delivered door to door' [Burgess Sports, London]
- '**Delivering food parcels** all across the black country. Looking at doing some online fitness/boxing videos for Instagram and may use the live feature on social media'. [Black Country Wellbeing Hub]
- 'Pythian are **doing a volunteer service** helping the elderly and vulnerable access food and essentials. They've got a FB support page where people and get in touch and Ben uses his staff and volunteers to deliver resources. Young people help out too'. [Pythian, Nottingham]
- 'Taking **support services online** - homework Club and **phone counselling service**, Food Bank referrals, Whatsapp Group to keep connectivity' [Zest Community Centre, Sheffield]
- 'Doing some **virtual activities** across the day, using video/instagram, press up challenge & quiz's etc - some staff posting videos, messages , exercise opportunities'. [Toxteth Fire Fit Hub, Liverpool]
- 'The Hive have a **virtual club night** across the week with Arts and challenges, cooking and quizzes' [The Hive, The Wirral]
- 'Using **TikTok to share funny ways of staying active** at home e.g. using a frying pan to practice tennis skills #SERVES' [London Sports Trust]
- '**Distributing equipment and creating various resources** including offline printed packs that encourage young people with a disability to remain active at home. Local authority support and a Just Giving page for donations to reach more vulnerable young people with a disability' [Disability Sports, London]

Support

Our discussions with LTOs have highlighted that the main area where they would like support from StreetGames and others was in relation to **funding opportunities** and **support with fundraising**. Followed by:

- On-line training for staff and volunteers
- Ideas for keeping young people active/engaged.
- Support and ideas on ways to re-engage young people when the lockdown period ends
- General advice on supporting young people/communities during this period.

In response to the needs identified by the LTOs StreetGames has worked collaboratively in a number of places across the country to plan support for them. This has involved close working and sharing of resources between StreetGames, Active Partnerships, Local Delivery Pilots, Local Authorities and other sport for development charities such as Sported. In Yorkshire & Humber for example, StreetGames is working closely with the Yorkshire Sport Foundation to support community organisations in need and in the Tees Valley, StreetGames is coordinating with Tees Valley Sport, the Local Delivery Pilot and local authority to ensure local organisations gain the support they need.

- *How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?*

StreetGames main contact and communication has been with Sport England. The Sport England initial response to Covid-19 was swift and clear. The flexibility offered in the early stages enabled us to offer reassurances to our partners and created space for us to focus on the needs of our beneficiaries and the locally trusted community organisations that support them.

Sport England team members appear to be empowered to follow the guidelines they have put in place for managing flexibility and have used the strong understanding they have built up over time of what we do, how we do it and how it contributes to our shared strategic priorities to be clear and supportive.

The package of measures announced by Tim Hollingsworth, CEO of Sport England on 31st March 2020, we believe, reflects the needs of organisations in the sector for the short, medium and longer term.

StreetGames has supported a number of locally trusted organisations with understanding the requirements of the Sport England Community Emergency Fund. The turnaround time for responses to applications appears to be as swift as was outlined at the outset.

What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

For StreetGames and the locally trusted organisations (LTOs) we champion and support in left-behind communities the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 are potentially manifold and complex.

The impact of Covid-19 on the economy and unemployment levels will inevitably increase the numbers of children and young people living in low income households or those where there is no employment. This will be coupled with issues around higher incidences of poor mental health, lower

levels of physical activity and increased risk of family breakdown. The need for the services and support of LTOs in local neighbourhoods will undoubtedly increase but at a stage where their futures will be uncertain due to the economic impacts of Covid-19. Protecting sport and physical activity as part of the local community offer will be challenging.

The short, medium and long-term financial sustainability of LTOs appears extremely challenging. Even prior to Covid-19, our network survey over recent years has shown that the significant majority of organisations are concerned about their financial future. In the [2019 StreetGames Network Survey](#) 87% of respondents told us that funding was their biggest challenge.

Our [2018 Network Survey](#) highlighted how funding concerns increase over longer time periods - with only 56% of LTOs agreeing that they are confident about the financial future of their organisation over a 12 month period, whilst this fell further to 32% over a 2 year period and just 25% over a 5 year period.

The funding and resources available in the short-term response to Covid-19 are important to the immediate preservation of vital community organisations but in many ways, the resources to support their work over the longer term will be more significant in dealing with the impacts of the pandemic on local communities. Anything that can be done in the upcoming stages of the Disaster Life Cycle to support stronger and more sustainable financial foundations for LTOs will better enable them to provide the support their communities need and in particular to maintain the hyperlocal opportunities to play sport and be active that are required in left-behind areas.

The Sustainability Leads in the StreetGames Area Teams report that Covid-19 has already increased this concern and this is likely to be the case on an ongoing basis. Providing the right support for targeted, outcomes-based fundraising and financial sustainability work with LTOs will be key.

The challenge of engaging volunteers to support sport and physical activity in left-behind communities was already significant [*Data from the latest [Active Lives Survey](#) show that volunteering rates amongst adults from lower socio-economic groups are less than half that of the highest socio-economic groups*]. The pressure brought about by Covid-19 for community members to find employment will likely increase that challenge significantly. Finding solutions that support local people to be active and offer opportunities for volunteering and the development of employability skills or routes to employment would appear beneficial. There are a number of tried and tested evidence-based approaches that could be implemented.

What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

The key lessons to date from the response of Sport England and the sector to Covid-19 include:

- The value of a swift, clear and focused response from Sport England to enable the sector to take action in response immediately
- The opportunities for closer collaboration between different parts of the sector focused around place. The need for a community response on a local authority and sub-local authority basis has created the conditions for national, regional and local organisations involved in the delivery of sport to better coordinate their efforts and use of resources

How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

Many of the future challenges for the sector will not be radically different to those it faced prior to the arrival of Covid-19. The challenge to increase activity levels and reduce inactivity remains significant and particularly for certain demographic groups. The inequalities in activity levels that exist between the most affluent and least affluent in society are at risk of becoming deeper and more ingrained with the wider social and economic impacts of Covid-19.

A longstanding challenge for the sport sector has been to reduce the barriers that exist for people from LSEG backgrounds in order to increase their levels of activity. Demonstrating and unlocking the wider benefits of sport and physical activity identified in *Sporting Future* (DCMS, 2015) and *Towards An Active Nation* (Sport England, 2016) will be crucial to making the case for sport to play its part in the healing and rebuilding process beyond Covid-19, particularly for those groups that will have been worst affected.

Collaboration at every level, across government departments, between different national organisations in the sports sector and between the different organisations that operate in local communities will be vital to addressing the ongoing challenges. This will be difficult when every organisation in the sector will be forced to look hard at its own priorities and purpose given the economic impact of Covid-19, potentially making it more challenging to address audiences that can often be considered much harder to engage. The DCMS can undoubtedly play its part in stimulating this collaboration through reinforcing the benefits of sport to wider society outlined in *Sporting Future* and maintaining its focus on the benefits of sport and physical activity reaching every part of society.

Whilst innovation will rightly form an element of the response to future challenges, evidence-based approaches that create the right sport and physical activity offer to meet the needs of different audiences will be as important as new and innovative responses. The challenge of social replication of ideas that work remains a significant one for the sport sector. The essential ingredients of existing evidence-based approaches can form strong foundations for evolution and innovation to address the new normal post Covid-19.

There are clearly lessons to be learned about increasing the sector's capability for digital delivery, particularly in areas such as workforce development and training. Building upon emergent digital innovations that enable people to be active whilst living with restrictions, such as those imposed under lockdown, will also be important. It should be recognised, however, that the issues around the digital divide and e.g. lack of access to home internet will impact engagement in this type of sport and physical activity by those from low income households. Feedback from our LTOs tells us that issues like lack of internet access are further exacerbated by low income households perhaps only having access to one digital device between multiple family members and there being a lack of available private space within the household to exercise. A carefully considered inclusive approach to digital innovation will be required to avoid further increasing exclusion of some target audiences.

The nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessary response to it has severely tested the resilience and business continuity planning of the sector. Any challenge or crisis that involves people being unable to congregate for safety reasons in the future will inevitably impact sport and other group forms of physical activity again. Whilst adaptations and innovation can take place, the essence of many sporting and physical activity opportunities is that they involve people choosing to come together to enjoy a range of individual and collective wellbeing benefits. This is particularly true for the children, young people and families from left-behind communities that are the focus of StreetGames work. One significant challenge for the future will therefore be to find new and innovative ways to protect and sustain the hyperlocal organisations that enable sport and physical activity to take place, improve neighbourhood life and unlock their benefits for individuals.

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