



Clerk of the Committee of Public Accounts  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

31<sup>st</sup> January 2023

Good afternoon,

I write in response to the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts report from earlier this month entitled 'Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity'.

I take great interest in the grassroots sport and physical activity landscape, with much of my career dedicated to its advancement. Along with many sector colleagues, I was disheartened to read the Committee report which highlighted a great number of challenges. Regrettably, these were not surprising or unforeseen findings.

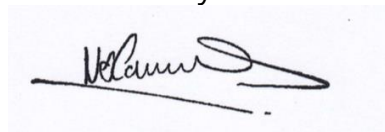
This note has been written to provide comment upon the seven recommendations made by the Committee. It has not been written to provide lengthy commentary upon the findings of the report, but to suggest additions to the recommendations which we believe are key to addressing the identified issues.

My colleagues and I recognise the important function which the 'grassroots sport' sector holds in addressing public health and social mobility. We are committed to ensuring public funding is utilised carefully and is directed to those individuals and communities with the greatest physical and mental health challenges.

The programmes delivered by my organisation, SportWorks, support over 30,000 individuals and 500 community groups every year. Consequently, the comments overleaf are based upon our experience of designing and delivering impactful programmes which can self-sustain without the need for long term public funding.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further input to you and/or the Committee to help ensure the sector is properly resourced and supported.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil Cameron", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Neil Cameron  
Founder & Director  
SportWorks

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**House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts  
Grassroots Participation in Sport and Physical Activity  
January 2023**

Conclusions and recommendations (out of 7):

**Recommendation 1:** *Using its learning from hosting recent major sporting events, the Department should clearly set out in its Treasury Minute response, the intended participation outcomes from hosting future events. In-particular this should focus on the performance metrics it intends to use and the long-term approach for monitoring these.*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation.

**Recommendation 2:** *In its Treasury Minute response, Sport England should report back to the Committee on how it expects each of its initiatives will translate into change in participation rates at a national level, and how it will evaluate this.*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation. Further, we propose that Sport England and DCMS focus greater effort upon monitoring participation and behavioural change rates over a medium/long term basis, as opposed to its current focus on short term data. This would result in an improvement on the current evaluation model (which focuses primarily upon attendance levels *during* project initiatives) to that of a post initiative evaluation. This is the only way to assess whether funded initiatives lead to sustained improvements in physical activity levels and, therefore, health improvement.

**Recommendation 3:** *In its new strategy, the Department should set out the specific outcomes it is aiming to achieve with inactive groups, what targets it is working towards, and how it will measure progress.*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation. We propose that the DCMS and Sport England should improve engagement with organisations which operate within the grassroots sport sector in order to establish a clear baseline measurement and determine appropriate outcome targets. Unless Sport England are prepared to collaborate with those organisations who directly work with such individuals, we remain concerned as to the accuracy of their data and understanding.



**Recommendation 4:** *Sport England should, by June 2023, write to us with details of the barriers for the least active groups, and what action it is taking to address them to ensure people have the motivation, confidence and opportunity to participate in physical activity.*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation. Further, we advocate that Sport England's current model of engagement and communication with organisations operating in the sector should improve. There are many organisations, including SportWorks, who work directly with the most inactive communities and individuals and who can provide first hand detail regarding overcoming persistent barriers. Sport England has, to date, refused to engage with our own efforts to establish effective communication channels. This is directly opposite to our experience with Sport Wales and Sport Scotland, who have welcomed open dialogue regarding collaboration within the sector.

**Recommendation 5:** *Sport England should, as part of its 2023–24 Annual Report and Accounts, clearly set out a full geographical breakdown of where its funding is being spent and how it is ensuring spending is targeted at deprived and less active communities. If this is not possible, it should write to us and explain why that is the case and commit to implementing in future annual reports*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation. Further, we ask the Committee to reflect upon the fact Sport England announced [£550m of funding](#) for 120 organisations in 2022. Not one of these organisations delivers any form of sport, physical activity or exercise provision. We are curious as to why such (unprecedented) levels of funding for our sector have bypassed organisations who have the capability to directly engage and support inactive individuals. Strategy is important, but so too is direct delivery.

**Recommendation 6:** *In its new strategy, the Department should set out what it and Sport England will do differently to ensure sustained integration and collaboration with other bodies to achieve increased levels of physical activity.*

**SportWorks comment:** It is our recommendation that Sport England's remit should extend to the collaboration, support and engagement of organisations who provide sport and physical activity provision at a local and hyper local level, and ensure robust monitoring of behavioural change is a condition of funding. It is remiss to expect strategic level bodies, none of which have any form of physical activity "offer", to be able to effect change amongst England's most hard to reach communities.



**Recommendation 7:** *The Department should urgently review the condition of leisure facilities and, working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and other government departments, take action to ensure their financial sustainability. The Department should write to us with an update on this review by June 2023.*

**SportWorks comment:** We agree with this recommendation. However, we would ask the Committee to recognise that access to leisure facilities will not alone address stubborn inactivity levels. Sport England's data demonstrates that the most sedentary, hard to reach individuals do not readily utilise leisure facilities. Instead, our recommendation is that greater levels of focus are placed on ensuring appropriate physical activity opportunities are available across multiple types of facility at a local (and hyper local) geographical level.

