



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Tuesday 3 March 2026

Session 6



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HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
10th Meeting 2026, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP)
- *Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con)
- *Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)
- *Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)
- *Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)
- *David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
- *Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
- *Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Kim Atkinson (Scottish Sports Association)
- Jon Doig OBE (Commonwealth Games Scotland)
- Forbes Dunlop (sportscotland)
- Dr David Meir (University of the West of Scotland)
- Jenni Minto (Minister for Public Health and Women's Health)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Alex Bruce

LOCATION

The Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Tuesday 3 March 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:15]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Haughey): Good morning, and welcome to the 10th meeting in 2026 of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. I have received no apologies.

The first item on our agenda is a decision on whether to take items 6 and 8 in private. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Sport and Physical Activity

09:15

The Convener: Our second agenda item is an evidence-taking session on key issues and future priorities in relation to sport and physical activity in Scotland. I welcome Kim Atkinson, chief executive officer of the Scottish Sports Association; Jon Doig, chief executive officer of Commonwealth Games Scotland; Forbes Dunlop, chief executive officer of sportscotland; and Dr David Meir, lecturer in sport coaching and development at the University of the West of Scotland.

We move straight to questions from Brian Whittle.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning. I have got my way: we have sport on the agenda until the end of the parliamentary session.

I will start with a general question. What part does sport play in people living a healthy life?

Forbes Dunlop (sportscotland): Good morning. Thank you again for the opportunity to come along to speak with the committee.

Sport is an absolute foundation to a healthy life. The evidence on sport and physical activity is extensive. I am conscious that I am sitting next to an academic colleague who can speak more about the evidence than I can, but the research is compelling on the impact of sport and physical activity on people's physical, mental and social health. That is why it is so important that we encourage more people to be physically active by whatever means they can.

Brian Whittle: I will layer something on top of that for Dr David Meir. I think that we would all agree with exactly what Forbes Dunlop said. Given that healthy life expectancy in Scotland has reduced, what does that tell us about the role that sport plays in Scotland at the moment?

Dr David Meir (University of the West of Scotland): That is a very difficult question. First, sport is only one element. If we approach this from a policy perspective and consider the physical activity for health framework, we see that sport is only one element of promoting health. It is important to recognise that sport is one attribute of that.

Participation in sports has tended to stay relatively static in not just Scotland but many countries, for numerous different reasons. The bottom line is that, if we are to see increases, be it in sport or physical activity, that will require more targeted investment. We are continuing to do similar things and get similar results, because the money is not there to support it.

Brian Whittle: Kim Atkinson is here to represent governing bodies. Given the feedback from governing bodies about the current situation for resource to deliver what they can deliver, it is my feeling—I should declare an interest as a performance coach—that those bodies are increasingly struggling to deliver across platforms that they should be able to deliver on.

Kim Atkinson (Scottish Sports Association): Thanks, Brian. It is lovely to see everyone this morning.

There is a balance in everything. At the end of a parliamentary session, it is always interesting to look back and see where things were and where things are now. I feel that Scottish sport has made monumental progress in many areas. We are sitting in a fortunate position: the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth games are on the horizon, our men's football team has qualified for the world cup and we have just had a phenomenal winter Olympics with a Scottish team in the curling. There is a huge amount to celebrate both from a performance point of view and as we look ahead, and I know from speaking to our members that a huge amount has been achieved. I was speaking to Tennis Scotland the other day; it has had a 25 per cent increase in membership over the past five years.

Brian Whittle: I am sorry—which organisation was that?

Kim Atkinson: Tennis Scotland. A 25 per cent increase represents huge progress.

Innovative partnerships are happening across Scottish sport, too. For example, Bowls Scotland has a huge partnership with a veterans charity. That is an innovative and really different approach; it is looking at the contribution that it makes for older adults and at working in different partnerships. Table Tennis Scotland has a unique partnership with Parkinson's UK, and the event that it hosts every year is one of its best attended events. Honestly, if you can go, do so—it is incredible. The feedback from the chief executive of Parkinson's UK in Scotland is that it is changing lives for people with Parkinson's.

We can see that, across any number of measures, a lot of really good stuff is happening, but you are absolutely right—there is no getting away from the fact that the environment is really challenging. That is true across the whole of sport. We know that 90 per cent of investment in sport in Scotland goes through local authorities, and our local authority partners are struggling. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is not here today, but I am sure that it, too, would say that this is a challenge, as would our partners in Community Leisure UK, who are also doing amazing things.

There is a silver lining for governing bodies, though. As a result of the vast partnership work being undertaken through us, the governing bodies, sportscotland and the Scottish Government, new investment is going into Scottish sport. The new £40 million uplift that has been approved in the budget will be a huge boost to Scottish sport, and it presents a massive opportunity, although we know, too, that it does not quite fulfil the Government's own commitment to double the contribution to sport that it outlined in both its manifesto and the programme for government. Moreover, we know that it is not all sustainable; as things stand at the moment, only half of that investment will be on-going.

I hope that that investment will give the workforce in Scottish sport a bit of stability. Indeed, sportscotland has been championing and leading on that workforce planning so that the people involved know that they will have jobs, that they will not be made redundant and that they might actually get an uplift in salaries—some for the first time in many years. That will, in turn, support the club network, the volunteer network and a wide range of other things.

It has been a tough time, but if it shows one thing, it is how very resilient sport is. We all know sport increases our resilience—well, that has certainly been true for the workforce across Scottish sport. We are optimistic that more positive times are ahead, but we are still looking to secure more of that funding on an on-going basis.

Brian Whittle: Thanks for that. I am trying to look at something that we have talked about before—the whole journey from preschool to primary school to secondary school and then into sport and beyond. Where are we with creating that pathway? My gut feel from seeing what is happening on the ground—and this is anecdotal from my own sport—is that clubs are struggling to recruit and to put teams out in leagues and so on. Where are we with creating that sort of pathway, and that ease of pathway?

Forbes Dunlop: There is a real difference across sports. There are, as with everything, some examples of really good progressive work, and examples of other sports that are struggling a little bit more. The connections between the active schools programme, in which we invest £12 million a year, the 400 co-ordinators and the work that they do to increase physical activity in primary school, and local clubs can come down to the capacity of volunteers within those clubs to make some of those links. Where there is that capacity and where you have people who perhaps have that little bit of extra time, we are seeing some really good work, but it is, as with sport across the country, very dependent on the volunteer network.

The pathways for people who are active are very good, but for those who have not quite made it into those pathways, it is definitely more of a challenge. If you have made that first step, are in a club and want to progress, you will have some good opportunities open to you, but I recognise that it can sometimes be difficult to take that first step into a club and the club environment. I also believe that school-based activity could be enhanced.

Brian Whittle: In my day—those are the three most dangerous words in life—you would be introduced to sport at school. That does not happen as much now, certainly in comprehensive education; indeed, I have often said that sport is becoming the bastion of middle class and private education. How do we release the school estate, if you like, into that wider environment for sports? How do we utilise what we have? Given the huge squeeze on facilities just now, are we utilising what we have to best advantage?

Forbes Dunlop: I will touch on two points there. We are just coming to the final stages of the review of the active schools programme. We are very proud of that 20 years' worth of investment—there was continuous investment over that period into a programme that employs 400 co-ordinators, and every school in Scotland is connected through a co-ordinator to that programme.

The review of the active schools programme, which has been led by Research Scotland, has given us positive feedback. It has also highlighted where we need to do better. We are proud of the programme, because not many programmes have had that longevity. We can see the real impact of it, and we now see many people who were in the first wave or who benefited from active schools in the early stages coming through young leaders programmes into employment in sport, and also volunteering in or leading clubs.

The active schools review has been helpful. It has given us an opportunity to reflect. Our board had a big debate about it last week, and we will have another final conversation when the report is concluded in April. Part of our thinking is how active schools sits alongside all the other interventions that should be happening in the school environment. That is one piece of work.

It would be nice to come back in the new session and talk more when that piece of work is completed.

Brian Whittle: Yes, it would be nice to come back in the new session. [*Laughter.*]

Forbes Dunlop: On your second point, about the school estate, there is another significant piece of work in its final stages. We have conducted more than a year's worth of work to do a full review of the sport and leisure estate in Scotland. That

piece of work looked at the community facilities and, importantly, the school facilities. It builds on work that we have done in the past to look at the school estate.

Again, you will see a very different picture in different schools and local authorities across Scotland. Some have fantastic access agreements and agreements with local community clubs and organisations, but others do not. Part of our job is to work with those authorities to challenge some of that practice.

We are also aware that the contracts for the first wave of public-private partnership schools are coming to an end. I know from speaking with colleagues in Falkirk that those first contracts have come back in and the council is taking those over again. There is an opportunity to look at how school facilities are accessed as those contracts come through. It is very patchy out there.

Kim Atkinson: Forbes Dunlop's point about active schools is powerful, but let us not forget that that is the first money that has ever been moved from the health budget directly into sport. Look at the impact that it has had. However many years on, it is still having that impact, so that is a good case study to be aware of.

Innovative things are happening in schools. Pickleball has our newest recognised governing body in Scotland. More than 8,500 visits were made to pickleball sessions in one term in Scottish schools, which is huge for a very small and growing sport. There has been innovative work done in curling across the additional support needs network. Innovative things are happening where there are those connections.

On your point on facilities, Brian, I know that that is a favourite conversation of both of ours. In terms of the asks in our manifesto, our members have said to all the parties that community access to community facilities continues to be a huge challenge, and the school estate is inevitably part of that. That is part of that conversation that we had recently—Forbes and I were there—with the COSLA special interest groups, which showed that councillors have real commitment to solve the issue. There is a lot of appetite for that. It remains a huge challenge, but, as you say, the opportunity is huge.

However, let us be very clear: the language that our members use is about community access to community facilities, not community sports access to community sports facilities. This is a community issue. Brian, you have been in conversations that we have hosted with the cross-party group on sport. In work that we do across the wider voluntary sector with colleagues from YouthLink Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, the Scouts Scotland network, youth organisations or any type

of community body, people say that if the community cannot get into a community facility, there is nowhere for people to go. If we are talking about creating social connections, intergenerational connections in communities and diversionary activities for young people—pick your social area—but there is nowhere for people to actually go, you are snookered at the first hurdle.

Inclusive and affordable facilities are still a huge issue that is raised by our members, without question, but as you say, it also an issue at that local level, and there could be a huge opportunity in the school estate.

I remind the committee that in your committee report on children and young people, from early doors in the parliamentary session, you referred to the fact that access to the school estate was raised as an issue in your predecessor committee's report, so it is a very long-standing issue. Convener, we ask on behalf of our members whether that issue could be looked at as a legacy action for the next committee. As Forbes said, work is going on on that, and to be able to come back and have a conversation about community access to community facilities in the next parliamentary session would be incredibly powerful.

The Convener: I will bring in Jon Doig, since he works at the sharp end of sport and—I hope he will not mind me saying this—he has been there for a while. Is there a trend in terms of where performance athletes are coming from and what pathways they are following?

09:30

Jon Doig OBE (Commonwealth Games Scotland): Our teams come from a wide range of backgrounds, and it is probably fair to say that each sport has its own socioeconomic background. One of the strengths of team Scotland is that we see different people from different parts of the country. All 32 local authorities have been represented. We had a 72-year-old gold medallist from Dumfries in the most recent Commonwealth games and a 13-year-old swimmer from Shetland in the 2014 games, so the athletes come from different directions. It is only when we go through the process for the upcoming games that we will get an idea of how those demographics may have moved, but the athletes tend to be from the same elements.

All those athletes face different challenges based on where they come from, the expense of their sports, and their and their families' commitments, so the wider network is really important for them. At the upcoming games, we will have 165 athletes, all of whom come from local communities. That is effectively where it all starts:

where they and their families come from. They then move into the system, with Forbes Dunlop, the governing bodies and the Scottish Institute of Sport, and some athletes are on the United Kingdom sport programmes. Help is needed at every stage, but we have a wide range of athletes from across Scotland.

Brian Whittle: I will squeeze in one more little question. One of the things that was talked about during the 2014 Commonwealth games was legacy. It disappointed the committee to see some of the great facilities that had been built falling into disrepair, when they were supposed to be part of the legacy. The hockey facilities at Scotstoun are an example. There must be some disappointment that that legacy has not been developed.

Jon Doig: I recognise that, as Kim Atkinson and Forbes Dunlop said, there are challenges across the wider sector. I pay tribute to the fact that, were it not for the other facilities that were built, we would not be having the 2026 games. There is a trade-off in terms of that aspect and that level of investment. I will let Forbes Dunlop talk more broadly about the wider facility network. However, what we have done with the games, and having the Emirates arena and the facilities at Tollcross and Scotstoun, has meant that we have been able to move forward and, in the space of two years, prepare to put on these games—with some investment in refurbishment from Commonwealth Sport.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. We were talking about health and wellbeing at the beginning. At the other end of the age continuum, we are seeing a real rise in walking football and rugby across Scotland—there is now a women's walking football team at Annan. However, there are also challenges with facilities for walking football teams. The Stranraer club is partnering with Stair park and Arthritis UK, which was formerly known as Versus Arthritis. That makes me think about the health and wellbeing aspect of supporting people to be fitter for surgery such as knee replacements, which we have heard about. Will you comment on walking football and rugby? I have participated in it, and it was great fun. The other players were far more skilled than I was, but I am interested in walking football and rugby.

Forbes Dunlop: I will add walking netball to that. The bounce back to netball programme, led by Netball Scotland, has been hugely successful. It has encouraged women, in particular, who played netball at school to come back to it a number of years later. It is also a walking version of the game. The developments over the past 10 years have had a big impact. However, your point about how to access facilities applies to every version of sport.

As we have seen in conversation with the Scottish Football Association, the number 1 challenge is getting access to pitches. There is more talk about the growth of the women's and girls' game—more so, necessarily, than the walking game—but the issue is the same: how do people access facilities to take part in those growing, developing areas of sport? They are a great addition and a great development.

I would also mention the work of the leisure trusts, which do some fantastic general practitioner referral work. They do intervention work and support work for people pre-surgery and pre-appointment, while they are on waiting lists. Some fantastic work is done by leisure trusts across the country, with a particular focus on older adults.

Kim Atkinson: Thanks for that great question, Emma. Just to build on what Forbes Dunlop has said, I would mention two particular things. You will all be aware that the Scottish Government has launched the physical activity for health framework, and many organisations were part of that. The caveat is that we need to remember that sport and physical activity are about more than just health. However, the contribution that they make to health positions them very strongly and presents us with a huge opportunity to move forward.

On your point about facilities, Brian, we need to ensure that a conversation happens between national and local partners. Scotstoun was mentioned by Jon Doig. As, I think, committee members are aware, Tennis Scotland is facing a real challenge in losing indoor tennis facilities so that padel facilities can be built. As the governing body for both tennis and padel, it wants that, but it has offered a grant free of charge, so as to say, "Can you build facilities outdoors?" We need to make those connections better. Similarly, there have been conversations around hockey. We need to ensure that those things connect in order to provide the legacy that Jon was talking about.

You are spot on, Emma, on the connection for older adults. I remember the former chief medical officer, Sir Harry Burns, saying that one of the key targets for health should be people pre-retiral. We are supporting a social connection for people who are still getting out and doing things. As you say, they are maintaining an aspect of health from being at work, being active through work and connecting with people. We need to target that a little bit more. The sports that you mentioned and that Forbes Dunlop has picked up on are perfect examples of that. I would echo what Forbes said. So many sports would love to run an adapted version—any number of different things—and Scottish Disability Sport is a master of that.

On Brian Whittle's point, sport has been challenged with a certain level of resource and faces the question, "If you had a little bit of money in an innovation pot, what would you do?" Walking basketball seems like a very easy suggestion. Many other things could be considered by governing bodies, but give them the resource and say, "You are experts in your sport. You are connected with pathways worldwide. What is everybody else doing?" There has never been the luxury of saying, "What would you do? What would that look like?"

I hope that everybody has seen Scottish Disability Sport's call to action. That relates to your point, Emma, on the health benefits of putting physical activity into the heart of opportunities for people with a disability, so as to genuinely save lives, not just change lives. There is a massive opportunity in that.

Many years ago, there was a report on sport for health that mapped out the sport that people should be participating in, depending on the kind of condition that they had, to benefit their health and longer-term opportunities throughout their life. That approach has never been considered in Scotland, but it works through a set of questions about whether a person has had physical issues, whether those were musculoskeletal, heart conditions or respiratory issues, and whether they need to build bone density, for instance. People would get an indication of the exact types of sports that they should work on.

What an amazing opportunity it would be, in the future, to sit with a GP referral saying, "Here's what would be beneficial for you." The person would go through the process and you would say, "Here are the local sports that are available to you." We could get to social prescribing: "You should be doing a little bit of table tennis," "You should be doing a bit of bowls," "You should be doing a bit of walking," or "Here is where the local club is." There is a huge opportunity there, which we are missing. It would mean a step further in research, but the governing bodies would love to be part of those types of conversations, knowing that their sport could be available to so many more people.

Emma Harper: I know a young woman who started playing wheelchair rugby. Her asthma was unstable, so she did not need to use a wheelchair all the time. When she started playing wheelchair rugby, her lung health improved and she is now part of the Edinburgh Rugby club.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): This adds to what Emma Harper and Kim Atkinson have been saying. I would be interested in hearing about the piece of research that has been done. I recently visited a group of women in quite a rural area—the boost group in Girvan—and they were

talking about the kinds of things that they would like to do. It is sometimes difficult to find the space, as has been said, but people are often very good at coming up with their own solutions. Referring to the research that you have talked about, what can we do to gather information about how people can get solutions for different kinds of sports and activities that would suit their health needs? Is there something more that we need to do at a Scotland-wide level to capture that?

Forbes Dunlop: Speaking as someone who works for and leads a national agency, I think that the best solutions are always found locally. The group that you met will have much better insight into what will work for their community than we will ever have, sitting in our office in Glasgow. Much of our investment goes to local partners, and it is for local partners to engage local community groups as a condition of the investment, to ensure that what is being offered meets local needs.

On Friday, I met South Ayrshire Council and we talked about that very thing. We spoke about our investment in community sport hubs, the work that is happening in Girvan and some of the groups that are developing and growing there. I strongly believe that those initiatives need to come from communities. Our job is to get investment to local partners and ensure that that investment is targeted to local groups, which can decide on and design what is right for them.

Kim Atkinson: I have two thoughts on that. The first aspect is a recognition of the role that governing bodies play. There are many different activities in local areas, but, if a community sports club is registered with its governing body, it will have sets of assurances on child protection, equality and fundamental governance requirements that I am sure we all believe are vital for safety, health and inclusion in sport. Governing bodies have a network of clubs, but, with a little bit of support, they could have further detail and provide a reference point for each sport. I take Forbes Dunlop's point that having something nationally across every sport can be challenging, but that is the role of governing bodies. They have a lot of the data and could make it a bit more accessible in different ways with those kinds of opportunities.

The second aspect falls on the health service. I appreciate that that is difficult to say, because I accept that it is not exactly short of things to be doing. We know that if you are referred to a GP and have a conversation with them, you will be asked whether you smoke and how much you drink, but I believe that you are asked only sporadically, rather than routinely, how physically active you are. I believe that people are sometimes asked that question and that there has been a push on that over the past number of years, but I

do not know whether that is still happening to the level that we would like it to.

If we look at the quality-of-life indicators, our former chief medical officer will tell you that how physically active someone is will determine how long they will live more than any other indicator, so we need to consider asking that at every GP appointment. Beyond that, there should be a connection from the GP service to the community network, as Forbes Dunlop has said, to say, "We're aware that this is what is happening locally. Have you thought about A? Have you thought about B? Here are the local options."

There are many examples of where that works well in communities, but the other part of it is about saying, "What is the barrier that prevents people from going?" A huge amount of that, particularly for women and probably for some older adults, is confidence. It is all well and good to know that there is a sport that they could go and play, where everybody sounds very nice, but confidence is often a barrier. That might be because they have not played sport for a while or because they have a health condition that makes them think, "Can I do that?" I have seen examples of buddy systems in which someone will go with the person to the first couple of sessions, to help them to build their confidence until they think, "Oh, this is great." They will then peel off.

There is a different connection with the health service that could create an opportunity to ask those questions, but I also think that there should be a genuine, pragmatic connection to help people to have the confidence to take those steps and pursue those opportunities.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Good morning. What actions have been taken, and what further actions are required, to address the physical activity gap between girls and boys?

Forbes Dunlop: A huge range of interventions have been made. It was almost the central discussion at our board meeting a couple of weeks ago, when we were talking about active schools. The data clearly shows the difference in participation rates. Interestingly, girls' participation rate in the active schools programme is 48 per cent and boys' participation is 52 per cent. All the evidence would suggest that the rate can be quite close at primary school age; it is when girls move into secondary school that we start to see the difference.

We have a range of interventions, such as our fit for girls programme and our young female leaders programme, which bring together girls from across schools. We talk to them about the work that they are doing in their schools and the sessions that the schools are providing, and we really try to listen to them. We ask, "When you speak to your friends in

school who are not active and are not taking part in sport, what do they want? Can you help to co-design an intervention with them?" There are a range of national interventions and programmes that focus on bringing people together and giving them the confidence and some of the tools to have those conversations in their schools and their communities.

09:45

What more can we do? I think that there are many different aspects to this issue. You can easily fall into the trap of thinking that there is one single reason for girls not participating in sport as much as boys do, but it is definitely not that simple. There is a whole range of different reasons, and we need to systematically keep working on them and providing a whole range of different opportunities for girls. However, it is a stubborn challenge that we have been working on for years, and, as has been said, the data shows that things are pretty static and that we have really not made any inroads into some of the inequalities.

Jon Doig: I should add, from my end, that our team in the previous Commonwealth games had more women than men in it, and in the medal events of those games the balance was 50:50. In a lot of the events in which people can now compete, girls and women have an opportunity to perform at the top level, and they will be selected on the basis of merit and their ability to meet those particular standards.

The challenge that we have is in finding high-performance female coaches, but I know that sportscotland is tackling that at the moment. At the next games, the achieve development programme will sit alongside the team, and we will be targeting young female coaches to come and experience the games. That means that, when they next apply for the Commonwealth games or for other high-performance teams, they will not be told, "Well, you haven't been there, so we can't select you." They will have that experience, and they can learn from each other.

A number of initiatives are happening that are linked with that particular aspect, but that funnel, and what comes out at the bottom, will, I think, always be a challenge.

David Torrance: On you go, Dr Meir.

Dr Meir: There are a couple of points to highlight. The active schools data is good at telling us certain things, but it does not go deep enough to give us what we really need to know if we are to understand the real reasons for participation rates among young girls not necessarily growing. Obviously, it links with the significant drop-off rate in secondary schools, which we know happens for a number of reasons.

I also want to highlight the committee's own 2023 report on female participation in sport and physical activity, which made a couple of recommendations. It recommended, for example, an evaluation of the active schools programme. That has been put out to tender, so we will, I hope, see a lot of data coming back on that programme in the next 12 months.

A key point that stood out in that report, and which I think is really important, was the focus on fun over competition when it came to girls and women participating in sport. Indeed, it was a fundamental point, among many others associated with health and so on. It stood out to me in that report—indeed, it has stood out to me in reports on Norway's success at the recent winter Olympics and its own sport policy, which has a very clear focus on enjoyment and joy. These things are linked and are really important. If something is enjoyable and brings us joy, we are going to want to participate in it.

Sometimes we lose focus on the purpose of what we do. If we can really harness that in the activities that we put on and the programmes that we deliver, we will see an increase in participation.

David Torrance: Do you want to comment, Kim?

Kim Atkinson: It is a great question, and I very much welcome the committee's commitment to this subject. It has been a long-standing issue, and I really welcome the fact that you keep coming back to it.

There are a number of examples of really good practice. In that respect, I would certainly highlight Scottish Student Sport and the wider work that it does. I hope that committee members have visited its active campus co-ordinators, who are part of a new and groundbreaking project that it has been working on with sportscotland. Speaking of Scottish Student Sport, I would just point out that more women than men participate in student sport. It is a very unusual environment in that respect, but something is going very right there, so hats off to the brilliant team at Scottish Student Sport and its network.

Clearly, we have seen a huge change over the past number of years. It is not that women and girls being active is more important now to governing bodies than it has ever been—I think that they have always been very committed to it—but they have taken quite a number of fundamental steps to address the issue. For example, one of the top priorities in Scottish Golf's current strategic plan is supporting women and girls to be active. It is not priority number 6; it is right up there, and the organisation is doing phenomenal work to make it happen. Similarly, Scottish Rugby has just launched its specific women and girls programme

and strategy, and it has promoted teams internally to reflect the fact that that part of the game is just as important as any other part.

Obviously, it is also a huge part of what is happening in Scottish football. I think that Forbes Dunlop mentioned this earlier, but one of the key challenges that Scottish football would highlight is the waiting lists that are impacting on women and the growth of the women's game and the inability to access enough pitches to support the number of people who want to play football in the different clubs and the different activities.

A lot of really good stuff is happening.

I will note a couple of things about challenges. On the point that Jon Doig rightly made, there is a huge challenge with women's coaches. The number of female volunteers is a huge part of that. In sport, more men than women volunteer, whereas, in the wider voluntary sector, it is the other way round. You could say that they are both doing something right; you could read it either way. It all links to role models and to seeing somebody supporting you who understands what it is that you want to achieve.

A lot of it comes down to a time challenge. Are we supporting people to be more active and, more fundamentally, to volunteer or engage in their local communities? Volunteering numbers have dipped for the first time in many years, although we are now seeing a slow increase. Similar to my point to Brian Whittle about community access to community facilities, access to volunteers and volunteering support is an issue for everybody.

What can we do? As we have talked about before, we can consider employer-supported volunteers. Are we allowing people time off from their work, which is where most people spend most of their time, to take part in coaching, volunteering or any other form of community activity? People need more time, particularly when they are time pressured. Volunteering is riddled with inequality because volunteers are often people who can afford to take time out.

We need to do something to provide more resource for women—who automatically have more caring responsibilities than men—to enable them to be active, to engage, to volunteer or to coach. We need to support women to think, "I could be a future coach," or just, "They are supporting my volunteering journey." The role modelling within that is incredibly important—again, that was raised in the committee's report. There are some practical things that we need to do to support the infrastructure that supports physical activity among girls and young women.

David Torrance: Data collection was mentioned earlier. Could that be improved to

capture a complete picture of young people's participation in physical activity and to let us know what the barriers are?

Forbes Dunlop: Absolutely—there is no doubt that we could do a lot more. These things all come down to getting the right balance. Sport England, for example, spends millions of pounds each year on a participation survey. We rely more on the Scottish household and health surveys, which are at a much higher level and do not give us such granular detail. It is a judgment call as to whether we should spend more of the money that we have at our disposal on getting insight from further data research versus continuing to invest directly in clubs and coaches. We are always making that judgment.

We have recently agreed to put in place a new system—we are moving to a community system. In the simplest terms, it will take data from governing bodies, local authorities and school settings about all our facilities and it will map them all out. We will start to be able to see where there are high levels of participation, lower levels of participation and any mismatch between participation levels and facilities. It is a big database that will pull in all that information and present it back to us.

We are investing in the data collection space, but we can always do more. There is always a balance between how much information and data we gather and how much of the money goes out the door to support coaches, volunteers and clubs.

Dr Meir: I have had this conversation with people in practice. Money is limited. As an academic, if I went to an organisation to talk about, say, matched funding for PhD students, the voluntary or public sectors do not have the finances that exist in the private sector to provide that. What we can do—this was called for in Professor Grant Jarvie's report in 2019, in work by Nicholas Rowe and in work by me—is create closer connections between sport and academia, working to help and support one another within that. That provides a really important opportunity to build the data and to build our understanding of the why in what is happening in Scotland.

There is a lot of scope to develop our understanding. There are quite significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding about what is happening in sport and physical activity, both in schools and more broadly. We have touched on some of those issues: the utilisation of the school estate is one and the quality of physical education in primary schools is another.

It is really important to note that the number of people who undertake less than 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week currently stands at close to one in four of the

Scottish population. We see a disparity between an inactive class and an active class that has been growing for quite some time and that links obviously to poverty, specific inequalities and lack of opportunities. There are huge gaps in our knowledge, but there are steps that we could take to address that.

David Torrance: Can I ask one final question, convener?

The Convener: We need to move on, I am afraid. There is quite a lot of interest—we have only 50 minutes left of the session and we have covered only two themes.

David Torrance: No problem. Thank you.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): My first question is directed to Forbes Dunlop. When you gave evidence last March, you informed the committee that sportscotland was working with the University of the West of Scotland to develop an anti-racism framework for Scotland's sports sector. Can you give us an update on that work?

Forbes Dunlop: Absolutely. We have just received the final draft version of an anti-racism framework. The framework is for sportscotland in the first instance, but, as you can imagine, it will be easy to share it with our partners. In speaking to the lead for that piece of work, I felt strongly that we needed to lead by example and adopt a framework for sportscotland in the first instance. That does not change the fact that we do a wider range of work.

The work on that framework is pretty much finished. It has been led by Dr Khadija Mohammed, who not only works for the University of the West of Scotland but chairs the Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators—SAMEE. We commissioned that work through our partnership with SAMEE, which we have developed over a number of years, and that work has now been completed.

Gillian Mackay: That is great. What wider appetite is there across the different governing bodies that sit under sportscotland to adopt something similar or to develop their own version—particularly given what happened with Cricket Scotland in recent times?

Forbes Dunlop: There is huge appetite. A lot has happened in the past four years. Part of our partnership with Sporting Equals was about providing expertise and support to the governing bodies to review their policies, procedures, training and approach. Although our partnership with Sporting Equals is coming to an end, we have been working on that for three years and we can see that, over that three-year period and slightly longer, there has been some good progress. Of course, there is still more work to do.

The way I see it is that the anti-racism framework that we have developed gives us structure and something to reflect the work against. We have done a wide range of work, and it is important that the framework now gives us structure. Against that structure, it is much easier to hold us, as an organisation, to account. That is why I put it in the context of sportscotland in the first instance, but we will develop it further so that it can be taken up, applied and used by the governing bodies and other partners.

Kim Atkinson: Gillian Mackay has asked an important question, and I agree with Forbes Dunlop about the appetite. I know that the committee has been close to the work that Cricket Scotland has done and how seriously Cricket Scotland has taken it. It has developed its equality, diversity and inclusion action plan and has looked at cultural reform within the organisation.

Some of the important steps that it has taken can easily be shared with governing bodies, and I know that Cricket Scotland is happy to do that. Some of the e-learning module work that it has done is groundbreaking and is seen as best practice in several different areas. It has created a range of guides for local clubs and has an “alert us” system. Those are just a few examples of the things that Cricket Scotland has done, all of which it is happy to share, and there is real appetite for that across the governing bodies. It is a compliment to everybody—the way that they are progressing, the attitude that they have taken, their willingness to share and the appetite of other governing bodies to learn from that.

Gillian Mackay: That is useful. Thank you, Kim.

I have one question for the whole panel. What further actions could be taken to ensure that Scottish sport is welcoming and inclusive to people from all backgrounds?

Kim Atkinson: There are several parts to that. On the inclusion part, I would point to the work that Scottish Disability Sport has done and continues to do. A range of its work is award winning. We should look at its call for action and recognise the pragmatic steps that it has outlined, which can be taken by everybody. It is not about disability clubs or organisations; it is about work that any club can do.

There are four points in its call for action. It is about including people and making sure that they are involved in shaping services. It is also about taking a whole-sport approach—Forbes Dunlop can tell you about that—and making sure that there is an opportunity for people to be involved at each stage.

A huge part involves looking at the social care system and providing opportunities in that context.

We know that, from Scottish Disability Sport's point of view, an alarming number of people are still worried that their benefits will be cut if they are seen to volunteer or be physically active. Its report shows that an alarming proportion of those people—one in five—say that they know somebody whose benefits have been cut as a result of their being physically active. We need to be clear that that is not what social security systems are about.

10:00

There is also a considerable opportunity in how we think about social care and self-directed support. It is important to be clear that self-directed support moneys can be used to enable people to be physically active, because, as I say, we know the impact of people with a disability being active. I know that that is something that you are very close to, Gillian. Being active is literally life changing in terms of both the quality and the extension of life for many people. Scottish Disability Sport is genuinely expert in that, and its call to action is something that our membership would fully support.

A huge part of accessibility is exactly the same for anybody, regardless of whether they have a disability. It is about having somewhere local where people can participate in whatever they want to participate in. It is about local access. I appreciate that travel will be a huge connector for a range of people, but if there are not those local opportunities, that is a challenge for people.

When the committee did its inquiry on women's sport, its report had a huge focus on feminist town planning. That is a really interesting area to come back to. All the things that make a lovely environment for people, and particularly women, to be active in during the day relate to all the reasons why women are scared to be active at night. We need to consider that area, and we need to support coaches and volunteers to support people on their journey. It is the same set of issues that need to be addressed, Gillian. Those things cover a myriad of opportunities.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Hello. I am sorry, convener—it did not come through on my system that you had called me to speak. Is it my turn to ask questions?

The Convener: It is.

Sandesh Gulhane: Thank you. I have to declare my interest as a practising national health service GP—which is rather surprising, given the topic.

There has been a lot of discussion, especially involving Kim Atkinson, about GPs trying to create time to talk about activity and linking people to

local sports clubs. Kim, my first question is: how much time do you think GPs have to do that?

Kim Atkinson: I am entirely confident that you are much more of an expert on that subject than I am, Sandesh. I make no bones about how busy the health service is and what that looks like, but if we, as a nation, are serious about talking about preventative health measures, we need to create different opportunities.

What does that mean for the GP service and healthcare service? I do not know, but I think that everybody would be very keen to hear from them to understand what that would look like. I do not say that glibly, Sandesh. I do not question for a minute that our GP service and health service are incredibly busy. However, at the same time, there is a very small investment in Scottish sport, which cannot solve all the problems. I would like to think that we would all welcome genuine partnerships and opportunities. I am certainly not an expert in the GP system, so I am sure that any thoughts or ideas would be very much welcomed by all.

Sandesh Gulhane: [*Inaudible.*]

The Convener: Your microphone is not on.

Sandesh Gulhane: I was in general practice on Monday, seeing patients. We do not have a minute to do anything except address what the patient has come in with, which often involves multiple, very complex and difficult issues.

As part of the initial GP contract, there was a scheme that was supposed to create community link workers across all practices. It would have allowed GPs to say, "I think you would benefit from something outside traditional medicine and traditional drugs. Maybe see the community link worker." That person's entire job would be to ensure that the patient got out into the community and knew what local services were available, whether in relation to sport or whatever. However, the funding for that has not come through. We have had a massive fight to keep GP community link workers in some of the most deprived areas and deep-end practices, although, surely, that is the type of thing that we should be supporting. It is impossible for a GP to do that work and know all the things that are going on in the community for all the different topics that we see. Surely we should be fighting for community link workers.

Kim Atkinson: That is exactly my point, Sandesh. As you said, that role does not fully exist as it was hoped it would or as it perhaps once existed. It is not in any way an issue with GPs. Our GPs are incredible, and every single person in the country values what they do. It was in no way a slight on them, but your point about the opportunity is right. What a great conversation it would be if those from sport and public health got together

with GPs to talk about where there is potential, where there are opportunities and where we could collaborate and do something different. I know that Forbes Dunlop has regular conversations with colleagues in Public Health Scotland.

I think that there is an opportunity. Nobody is being critical. As you said, if resource was available or if conversations could be had about the role of community links workers in providing some of that support, that would be amazing. It is about opportunity, not a criticism of GPs.

Sandesh Gulhane: I fully agree that it is an opportunity, and it was part of the GP contract that should have been delivered.

Let us talk about the promotion of sport for physical activity. I was a member of my local council gym. My annual membership ran out, and I went to renew it. It works out at £32 a month to join that gym. I decided not to renew, and I am spending £16 a month at PureGym. I do not understand how we have got to the point where it is so expensive to be part of your local community gym. You said that if there is nowhere to go, we are snookered. For lots of people, £32 a month for going to do activities—which is very important—is a huge amount of money. I do not understand how the cost can be so high for us to maintain a healthy relationship with sport and physical activity.

Kim Atkinson: I agree that sport should be affordable and inclusive. The experts on that subject are our colleagues at COSLA, who are not around the table today. I suspect that their answer—apologies, as I am guessing—would be that 90 per cent of investment in sport in Scotland goes through local authorities and, for the most part, that money is not ring fenced, so we do not know what the actual spend looks like. It would be great if some of that resource could underpin accessible memberships at a range of community facilities, but such decisions are taken at the local level, not nationally, as things stand.

Our members would advocate for having a strategy for sport. We talk about some partnerships being able to translate from the local to the national level. However, the idea is—I suppose, ultimately, this was your point, Sandesh—that local authority-provided sport should be a universal service that is available to everybody and that it should be funded at an appropriate level.

I spoke with the former chief executive of High Life Highland, and I was struck when he said to me that, on his first day in the job, he happened to stand at the window of his office and look out over the car park of the sports centre, which he saw was filled with BMWs and Audis. He said that, if those are the cars in the sports centre car park, it is not meeting the target market or making sport and

physical activity accessible to everybody. There is a funding challenge too, but I take your point.

The same point is probably also true of community sports clubs, because a lot of them are based out of local authority facilities, which they have to pay high rates for. They then have to pass on the cost to members and those who do drop-in sessions. The cost is considerable and it is an on-going barrier to people being physically active. We need to consider that issue and try to work out how we can address it nationally and locally.

Sandesh Gulhane: I refer to a letter that was written in November 2025 on behalf of 39 organisations. The chair of Scottish Gymnastics wrote it. It spoke of how the 2021 programme for government promised to double funding for sport to £100 million and of a 25 per cent real-terms reduction before the money that is currently allocated will be in place. That means that the funding will not be doubled. The letter speaks about how things have become very difficult. It says that 37 per cent of adults and 38 per cent of children do not do the recommended amount of physical activity. It also says that there is a 25 per cent increase in the cost of sending sportspeople across the world to compete. Most worrying is that it says that a significant number of athletes who compete on the world stage now have to self-fund. It is absolutely disgraceful that people who are representing Scotland are self-funding to do that. We should be paying them and thanking them for what they do.

Will you comment on that letter? We have seen real-term cuts to budgets over the past four or five years, so that £40 million still does not bring us up to where we should be.

Forbes Dunlop: I am happy to come in on that point. I agree with all of the above. We work closely with the governing bodies, and I think that the letter from Scottish Gymnastics that you refer to is almost on behalf of the governing bodies. They made a collective case. The exact same case could and would be made if Community Leisure UK or COSLA were sitting here on behalf of local partners.

Which part of the system you choose to fund and which parts are not funded is always a balance. I would obviously advocate for more money for sport, because that is my role and my job, and the additional money that has been announced in the budget for next year is welcome. Half of the £40 million is what I would describe as core money, so we expect that it will recur in future years. The other half is to celebrate the summer of sport, which is also welcome, but it leaves a £30 million gap to the commitment of doubling the budget. If the ambition or the commitment was to move to

£100 million, it should be noted that there is a £70 million budget next year.

Since the start of this session of Parliament, when that commitment was made, inflation has been pretty significant. We are only ever starting to catch up on those matters and everything moves on again, so we are continually prioritising things. SportsScotland has to prioritise its budget, the governing bodies are prioritising their budgets and the local partners are doing exactly the same. However, I would always advocate for more money for sport.

Sandesh Gulhane: I suppose that the most important thing to say before my final question is that there are other gyms available, not just the one that I happened to mention.

We have spoken about women and girls playing sport, and we have seen in the report that they do not continue to participate, despite everyone starting off together in school. We have spoken about dedicated women who are coaches and volunteers, and the need to promote that, but I wonder whether there is a place for our local community council gyms in promoting, for example, mothers participating in physical activity. One of the strands in our report was that, if a young girl sees her mother participating in physical activity and sport, she is far more likely to do so herself.

Is there a place for our local community assets—gyms, swimming pools and other places—in trying to get mothers, in particular, into sports and physical activity?

Forbes Dunlop: Yes, definitely. What immediately comes to mind, given my previous roles, is some work that was done by Scottish Swimming. There is a huge swimming programme for mothers and babies. You would probably find that programme in most pools across Scotland, but I am sure that, if we spoke to our local partners, there would be many examples of classes for mothers and young girls that we could provide information on. I am almost certain that there will be, because that piece of research has recognised the impact that a mother has on her children's participation in sport.

I am sure that we could do more. I know that there is activity going on, and we could certainly find out some information about that for you.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I will spend some time speaking about the barriers to physical activity, which we have spent a lot of time discussing in your answers to my colleagues.

I was trying to think about the entire ecosystem of sport and physical activity. I used to be the chair of our local sports council, the chair of the leisure

trust and the COSLA spokesperson who covered the area. We are missing how to pull all that together, as has already been mentioned. Everybody is responsible for their part in the system. If we think about barriers, cost and being able to access things in your local area, is there a space for empowering our communities a little bit more? We could think about community asset transfers or where local communities have taken on assets and widened out access to people, or about supporting social enterprises such as Biosphere Bikes down in Girvan or Cycle Station near my house—social enterprises that provide people with access to cycling and bikes. Is there a golden thread that we are missing? How do we pull it all together so that all the bits of the system support people to engage in physical education and activity?

10:15

Forbes Dunlop: We have referenced a couple of times the physical activity for health framework, which was developed by Public Health Scotland. We recognise that that is based on worldwide evidence that was applied to the Scottish context. We have put our weight behind that and given it our full support. We are working closely with Public Health Scotland and with local authorities—15 of them now, I think—on using the framework as the tool to talk about local planning, linking it to the community planning partnerships and thinking about how that all connects. If not quite the golden thread, it is the thing that pulls this together. It recognises that, although sport and leisure are one component part of the framework, you need all eight of the different components firing up if you want to make a population change in physical activity.

The framework is the go-to tool at the local level. It is the tool that is now being adopted by local authorities, and we are working closely with them and Public Health Scotland to develop it. It is very much developed with local communities and local people feeding into it, describing what their environment and community feel like and what they would like to see more of. That is probably the best tool that we have to pull it all together.

Through our work, we regularly pull together local authority and leisure trust leads and the governing body leads. We talk about joint planning, about how we can work better together and about understanding one another's challenges, priorities and problems. Local partners sometimes have different priorities and they definitely have different issues and challenges, and it is important that governing bodies and national partners understand those and that we can work together to overcome them.

There is lots of work to bring together local and national bodies to join things up, but the physical activity for health framework is probably the key tool that we have just now. As I said, it is early days, with just 14 or 15 local authorities using it as a planning framework. Last year, Glasgow was the first to publish its new strategy off the back of that, and I know that there are a few others that are just about to publish their strategies.

Elena Whitham: It is interesting that you mentioned community planning partnerships. Having been a member of one, I know that the overarching aims of an entire area and all the community planning partners stem from that body—all the decisions flow from it. That was a very helpful comment.

Dr Meir: The physical activity for health framework is a generational opportunity for this type of thing. We are talking about systems-based approaches to addressing significant issues around health inequalities, which are a significant problem for life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in Scotland. The role of sport and physical activity in that is important.

As Forbes Dunlop said, Glasgow Life was the first to develop the strategy in partnership with Public Health Scotland. We need to understand the process that Glasgow Life and the local authorities that are in the process of doing that have undertaken, and we need to be able to review the process to see where connections are being made and where the more significant challenges are. For instance, are we making really good connections at local authority level between sport, health and transport? Are we making really good connections between sport, health and education? Are those connections really strong, stable and, therefore, sustainable?

I am going to be on the leadership group for the development of the strategy in South Ayrshire. We are trying to do some research about the process and how it works; we will then review it in 12 months' time and so on. Public Health Scotland has been doing that with Glasgow Life.

There is a really good opportunity here. In fact, it is more than good—it is an excellent opportunity for the sort of thing that you are talking about: a joined-up understanding and a golden thread pulling together what is happening. It is not about giving more money to such an approach; it is about the need to work better with different people, different organisations and different partners to develop the situation. That is both a strength and a potential weakness, but in the current climate, it is the most appropriate approach to take. Monitoring it, evaluating it and reviewing it continuously will give us a far better understanding of how well the connections are being made.

Elena Whitham: That is helpful—thanks.

Kim Atkinson: This relates to your point about community planning. I sit on the board of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, and it will tell you that there are more than 45,500 voluntary organisations. There are 13,000 sports clubs, so sports clubs make up a third of the voluntary sector—they are at the heart of literally every community. The contribution to community planning is incredibly important, and the work that Forbes Dunlop has outlined is groundbreaking in terms of sport being part of that.

If we consider community planning partnerships beyond the examples that have been given, we find that sport is very rarely represented around the community planning table, as I am sure that people will have experienced. Sport tends to be represented by third sector interfaces, but the connection between sport and third sector interfaces is traditionally very poor and limited. There is now an opportunity for sport to be represented at the table and to be part of that conversation for the first time.

The situation is really positive for those examples that are already progressing really well, as Forbes described; it is also really positive for areas that want to take it on. There is a conversation to be had around community planning in other areas, with questions such as, "Have you thought about sport?", "Where are you hearing the local voice of sport?" and "Where is the connection?" being asked.

There are many great models illustrating where community asset transfer has worked well. I know that the Scottish Football Association is doing some leading work in that space. We also need to be aware of community liability transfer. There is a lot of nervousness about it in some areas, which you will understand.

There are a number of examples. I know that the Scottish FA is pushing an idea involving a voucher scheme that allows young people to be physically active, particularly through the summer and other holidays. It is a system that allows young people who cannot afford to be active free access to a range of things. We had a conversation about that in relation to previous manifestos, and it is well recognised among our members as being a model for young people and people with a disability to be active in a different way.

Similarly, our members have talked about the idea of club open days. It would be like a doors open day, but we would be asking whether sports clubs could be part of wider sustainability opportunities. Sports clubs could be open at different points, with communities being welcomed in so that people could understand what is happening and what is available and could try

something out. Each sport could be part of that conversation. There are a number of initiatives at a local level that create that community empowerment in different ways. There are many opportunities, and I am sure that there are different things that we could do.

Elena Whitham: Thanks—that is helpful. I do not know whether we have time, but I know that Jon Doig wants to come in.

Jon Doig: The legacy programme for Glasgow 2026 is embedded in the process. A meeting with something like 56 organisations was set up last year, and they came together to consider how they can use the games. There was a presentation on Thursday night with Scottish Athletics, Scottish Action for Mental Health, the Daily Mile and Scottish Disability Sport, whose representatives were talking about how they were linking together, using the common thread running through from the games. Forbes Dunlop and his sportscotland colleagues are linked into that process, too. There are some good examples of things linking up across the whole system. That is probably the next step. There are certainly a lot of open communication channels between everybody down that line.

Elena Whitham: That is good to hear—thank you.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the witnesses for their contributions so far. There has been a bit of a buzz from the recent winter Olympics. We know, however, that there are significant barriers to entry to winter sports—not just the climate in Scotland, which tends to be temperate with unreliable snow coverage, but the significant equipment and facility costs. There tend to be class barriers to access to winter sports.

One of the sports where we tend to do quite well is curling. There will probably be an uptick in people booking slots at curling rinks around Scotland. How do you envisage improving access to winter sports participation in Scotland, particularly given the recent loss of facilities such as the indoor snow slope at Xscape at Braehead? What other opportunities might there be to enhance participation in winter sports?

Forbes Dunlop: It is great to see our curlers getting so much profile and prominence. I am really looking forward to the Paralympic games starting. The opening ceremony is on Friday, and the games start on Saturday. We have a good contingent of Scottish athletes, as part of ParalympicsGB. I wish them all the best.

I will start with curling. The pressures on and challenges for curling rinks across Scotland are well documented. A couple of them have closed in the past year, and a number of them are under

threat. That is the first, primary issue that we need to continue to raise and find solutions to.

We had a session with Bruce Mouat last year after we won the world championships, when he made the point that although it was fantastic to be recognised and celebrated as the world champion, if there are no curling rinks, there will be no future world champions. We need to continue to work on that. We are doing a specific piece of work with Scottish Curling to look at the age and state of the curling rinks in Scotland and to start to develop some plans for how we protect them and, at some point, replace some of them.

Snowsport Scotland does some fantastic work to utilise the dry ski slopes across Scotland for community-based participation work, although some of the dry slopes are under pressure. I accept that there is a big step from using a dry slope to getting on to the snow and that it may not snow in Scotland—it has been a good season this year, but that is not always the case. Increasingly, people have to go abroad to be able to ski, which I accept presents a huge financial barrier.

Kim Atkinson: We spoke earlier about role models. You do not have to look very far from our men's curling team to see some incredible role models for Scottish society, which we certainly want to recognise. Scottish Curling does some incredible work on its try curling programme. I am not sure how close members are to that, but it is worth looking at. We talk about having inclusive, affordable and available opportunities for people to be active, and Scottish Curling is doing groundbreaking work in communities across Scotland.

When thinking about legacy, we have had the winter Olympics and, as Forbes Dunlop said, we are about to have the Paralympics. In 2029, Edinburgh will host the curling world championships. It is something to look forward to. On your point about inclusion and sport being accessible, it will be the most inclusive event that has ever been run in the UK. There will be a huge opportunity to build on our teams' past successes and on those that will continue to come, and we will be able to celebrate in Edinburgh in 2029.

Paul Sweeney: I will pick up on the costs of running some of the facilities. Common themes have emerged with swimming pools, given that the ski slope in Braehead closed primarily because of energy costs. Has any work been done to see how policy interventions can be developed to reduce the cost of operating such facilities, given their obvious public health benefits?

Forbes Dunlop: New and more energy efficient buildings are an awful lot cheaper to run than buildings that are more than 30 or 40 years old. Our estates report, which I referred to earlier and

which we will publish just after the election, will highlight that 70 per cent of the sports facilities in Scotland are 40 years old or older. You can imagine how energy inefficient those buildings are. Sometimes, retrofitting them to make them more efficient is even more expensive than replacing them. Net zero features quite heavily in our estates report. It talks quite a bit about the cost of making our buildings much more efficient. I know that that is only one part of the issue, but we think that it is significant. It will be very hard to achieve and deliver but, in the years ahead, we carefully need to consider how we fund the replacement, renewal and further enhancement of our estate.

Paul Sweeney: I look forward to reading that report.

I want to move to future visioning for Scotland. As a country, we have developed a significant capability in multisport event hosting and major event hosting for sport. We not only hosted the 2014 Commonwealth games, but we have been able to adjust to host the 2026 Commonwealth games at short notice, which is a significant challenge.

Even if it is slightly early, I wonder whether we ought to be considering the revised criteria from the International Olympic Committee on hosting potential for a summer Olympic games. I know that cities in northern England are looking at a potential bid with the British Olympic Association.

Should Scotland be contemplating potential participation in a British bid for the 2036 or 2040 summer Olympics? What could that look like? How do we use the 2026 Commonwealth games as a way to demonstrate our potential, given that Brisbane's successful bid for 2032 hinged significantly on its successful hosting of the 2018 Commonwealth games?

Forbes Dunlop: I think that Scotland has done an outstanding job at hosting major events in the past 20-plus years. EventScotland's strategy strapline was "Scotland: the perfect stage". We have demonstrated that across a range of events, from the Ryder cup to the Commonwealth games.

I am excited about the Commonwealth games this year. There are major cricket events coming in the years to come, and the Tour de France grand départ will happen next year. People will be aware—it is openly talked about—that we are part of a joint bid for the FIFA women's world cup in 2035. It looks as though the UK will be awarded that, and Scotland will host group stages.

10:30

I am a huge fan of major events. They give inspiration to volunteers. In my time working in swimming, when we hosted the International

Paralympic Committee world championships, the European championships and the Commonwealth games, all in Glasgow, there was a massive group of volunteers. When I go along to local swimming events now, it is the same group of people who are running local community swimming programmes, day after day, night after night and weekend after weekend.

As I said, I am a huge fan of major events and I advocate for them. When we go down the major event route, it is really important that there is a significant and appropriate amount of money that sits alongside the event to allow us to activate the event and take full advantage of it. We must also make sure that, when we are bidding for, attracting and securing those major events, there is an appropriate budget in order to activate the event and get everybody in the community involved.

Jon Doig: It will not surprise you to hear that I am also a fan of major events. I was taken to my first major event at the age of nine, 52 years ago, which was the Commonwealth games. Given that I am sitting in front of the committee here today, that obviously had some impact. I would not say that it was an inspiration as such at that particular time; "impact" is probably a good word.

As Forbes Dunlop said, in relation to our bids for and delivery of two Commonwealth games, we certainly have the facilities and the business development, as well as the people skills that have been developed over 20-odd years. When it comes to further bids, one of the lessons that are coming out of Glasgow 2026 is about looking at the finance. It is a privately funded games, and Scotland has led the way on a new model for the Commonwealth games—we are probably waiting for that new model to come through on the Olympic side—which will give more opportunities in the future. We do not know what those opportunities might be, but we are very proud that we have secured the future of the Commonwealth games, with Ahmedabad 2030 coming through and with Nigeria, which bid for those games, also expressing interest in 2034.

As is often the case, the nature and structure of mega, major events such as the Olympics will change over time, and by the time the next bidding round is available, it will probably open up and be more accessible to a wider range of countries; it will be like what we have done with the Glasgow bid.

Paul Sweeney: Great. Kim Atkinson, do you have a view on whether Scotland should join the emerging great northern bid for the 2036 Olympics and be proactive about participation in that or a 2040 bid? Is that something in which we ought to seriously engage?

Kim Atkinson: The conversations that we have had with members have not been about the long term in that respect.

As Forbes Dunlop and Jon Doig have eloquently outlined, we are the perfect stage—we have hosted many tremendously successful events. The legacy from events is really important, and as Forbes Dunlop said, there needs to be funding that works with that. It is about taking the broadest view of legacy. One of the big disappointments for our members and probably more broadly is that there was not a volunteering legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth games. For 2026, we have stepped in and are making sure that there is future delivery, alongside the work that Jon Doig and his colleagues have done. We are—understandably—looking at legacy slightly differently, but it is a huge part of what we need to consider.

Another aspect is recognising that major games are not just about multisport games. Many of our governing bodies host many successful events; we have talked about a number of them. Year on year, Scottish governing bodies work with local partners to support any number of national, international, regional and other huge-scale events. I talked about our Parkinson's table tennis event earlier. People come from around the world for that event.

We have successfully hosted many different sets of national and international events, and governing bodies continue to do that. A huge part of that success is the respect that exists for governing body volunteers, and the fact that the individuals who are representatives on the world federations or European federations champion Scotland to make sure that we can host the events that are decided on by those federations. We must not forget the people who are making that happen, and we must provide support and resource to them.

Hosting events involves a broad range of areas, but we are very good in many of those areas, which we need to continue to recognise.

Dr Meir: We should not go forward with a multination bid for hosting the Olympics, because of the stuff that we have talked about. People cannot necessarily access the facilities and there are significant issues with opportunities for people. We are talking about a multibillion-pound investment. The cost of London 2012 was £12 billion to £14 billion and rising. The legacy from these mega events is nominal. Lots of cities are rising up in protest against that, from Boston to Chicago and Frankfurt, I think. You are opening up a can of worms. You are talking about investing billions and billions of pounds in something that has nominal returns for the issues that we are talking about today.

The Convener: Two members have supplementary questions. If they are brief and the answers are brief, we can get them both in.

Brian Whittle: I am going to spin all the way back to where I was before. We talked about the participation of youngsters in sport, which is a lifetime investment in health. We have talked about some of the great work that is going on, some of the fantastic things that sports are doing and the impact that that is having, but loads of clubs have waiting lists, so we have kids who want to participate. David Meir said that we have flatlined on participation. We have all these kids who want to participate, yet they cannot access the sport that they want to participate in.

I suppose that it comes down to how we develop the volunteer element to increase capacity. The problem is that we always blame our youth. However, they want to participate, and we are not giving them the opportunity. How do we square that circle?

Forbes Dunlop: I have two points on that—I will try to keep this brief. It is good that we are starting to see an uptick in volunteering. As Kim Atkinson mentioned, there was a big dip in volunteering and, post-Covid, people who previously volunteered did not come back. However, we are starting to see the numbers coming back, which is helpful. The two critical barriers that I hear about are that there are not enough volunteer coaches and people to run sessions and that there is not enough access to facilities. Those are the two reasons why there are waiting lists for some sports.

Kim Atkinson: I agree completely.

To be pointed, I would ask for four actions in a legacy report for your follow-on committee. First, this committee has been very engaged in sport and has carried out visits and so on. I know that Brian Whittle and Paul Sweeney have been to a number of events. I would welcome it if your successor committee, whatever it looks like, took that approach.

On the points that Forbes Dunlop raised about facilities and volunteering, I suggest that those are cross-committee entities that are not specific to sport. Another legacy ask for future committees could be to talk about volunteering and community facilities—that could be an amazing cross-committee piece of work in the Parliament. That is certainly another ask.

Part of this is about infrastructure and recognising the health benefits that people get from being more active, which Sandesh Gulhane talked about. That is kind of everybody's responsibility. Sport can play a part in that, but many of us hold responsibility for physical activity and people being more active.

I know that a review is planned of the national performance framework, which we have talked about previously, and that there was a recommendation on that issue in the committee's report on participation in sport by women and girls. If there was a specific national outcome on people being physically active and participating in sport, that would place the responsibility on everybody and everybody would be part of that. We would certainly welcome that.

The fourth point is that the committee has strongly recognised—I think that this phrase was used in the title of one of the committee's reports—that sport is an investment and not a cost. We are sitting on the brink of having more money in Scottish sport than there has ever been. That is a huge investment and opportunity, and I would like the committee to continue to champion that.

In relation to the work that we have done across Scotland for the summer of sport, there is a lot that the committee can do. If you will pardon the pun, Brian, if the committee could pass the baton to your successors in the next committee to ask them to continue in the vein that you guys have been working in, collectively, we would be in a much better space.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I will pick up on the summer of sport, which Kim Atkinson mentioned. We have discussed the huge injection of funding into sport. Half of that significant amount of money is for the summer of sport, to ensure that there is a long-term legacy. Often, we wrongly think of legacy as being to do with the buildings, but, in fact, it is about the people. How can we ensure that that significant injection of funding has a legacy for the people?

It is important that, when we talk about the people, we go wider than kids and include older folk. Forbes Dunlop will be aware of the fantastic success of the swimming masters events. I want to give a shout-out to my sister, who, having got back into swimming, has just won six golds and a silver at the age of 60-whatever. How do we encourage folk of all ages to take advantage of the summer of sport to improve their access to sport and physical activity? I ask Forbes Dunlop to respond first, given that I mentioned swimming.

Forbes Dunlop: We have been working with a group of local and national partners—we met last week, and we will meet again tomorrow—to discuss how we provide the right criteria and the right direction for the summer of sport. However, we recognise that we should not overdo that work, because we have quite a short window, and we need to get money out, to local partners in particular, to allow them to get on with the planning.

We are finalising the criteria, the focus and the monitoring requirements for the summer of sport. My ambition is to make it a huge success and to make the case to the next Government that it should not be a one-off strand of money and that there should be a summer of sport every summer. If we are ambitious for people to be physically active and for sport to be a central part of Scottish society, we should celebrate sport every summer. We should take encouragement from the fact that, in every summer over the past 10 years, there has been a massive array of brilliant events.

The key thing is to work with local partners, because, as I have said a number of times, they know best what their communities want and need and what specific challenges they face. We do not need national organisations to get in the way by being overly bureaucratic, so we will listen to local partners and empower them to get on with it.

Jon Doig: I want to give a quick plug for the King's baton relay, which will take place in Scotland in the month of July. Community organisations can register through the "All In" section on the Glasgow 2026 website. I think that that is a great opportunity to use the power of the games and the power of the baton. The idea is to take the baton to community events, which will draw people in. That will be a great showcasing opportunity for people. I am really looking forward to our receiving those applications so that we can take the baton to as many places as possible.

Dr Meir: Obviously, it is fantastic that money is coming into sport. Out of the £40 million, £1 million has been highlighted for the health in the community campaign, which will target areas with low levels of activity to help people to become and stay active. As far as the policy is concerned, that is a fundamental element of the physical activity for health framework.

Mention has been made of legacy. Significant levels of investment need to be provided if we are to make significant changes to levels of engagement and participation for those who are the least active.

Kim Atkinson: It is a great question. I sit on the group that Forbes Dunlop mentioned. The conversation that we had last week was genuinely positive and, as Forbes said, cross-cutting.

In the conversations that we have had with members, the priority has been to work out what can sustainably be done with that amount of money. I know from a conversation that I had with one of Forbes Dunlop's colleagues yesterday that strong work is being done to support clubs. A key part of the broader work that sportscotland is doing is its work to support clubs to provide sustainability. Instead of just having one-off activity in the summer, we want to extend that beyond the

summer. Clubs will be a key outlet in that respect, with community clubs providing an opportunity for people to continue to participate. I mentioned club open days, which are an idea that has come out of that conversation. Clubs could be part of the sustainability piece.

Unsurprisingly, there is strong interest in that from a number of governing bodies. A few of the larger governing bodies have had a conversation about that with us. Given the number of clubs that there are—for example, there are more than 500 golf clubs—there is an opportunity for them to be part of the sustainability work. There are 13,000 sports clubs across Scotland. There is an opportunity for them to work with local partners and to play an essential connecting role.

We need to look beyond the summer, which I know is the plan. Monitoring and evaluation are key. That will be difficult in the timeframe, because, as Forbes Dunlop said, the money needs to get out the door so that people can plan and ensure that we deliver quality opportunities.

There is great excitement. We have been advocating for the doubling of the sport budget for the past five years. As Joe FitzPatrick will remember, it was a programme for government commitment. We have an opportunity to use that money as a cost of living intervention, because we know that sport and physical activity change lives.

We need to consider what opportunity there is to monitor what comes out of that expenditure so that we can say, “This has changed the lives of children and young people.” That will enable us to ask whether it would be sustainable to make that additional expenditure an on-going commitment, because we know that sport is a valuable tool for communities across Scotland, especially for young people, but also for community resilience, social connectedness and so on.

There is interest in that, but it is a question of striking the right balance between getting money out the door and creating the right conditions. I am sure that we will get there, and I am sure that we will have an amazing summer.

Joe FitzPatrick: Brilliant—thank you.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for their evidence. I suspend the meeting to allow for a changeover of witnesses.

10:45

Meeting suspended.

10:54

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Skin Piercing and Tattooing) Amendment Order 2026 [Draft]

The Convener: The next agenda item is consideration of a draft Scottish statutory instrument that requires approval by resolution of the Parliament before it can become law. The purpose of the instrument is to amend the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Skin Piercing and Tattooing) Order 2006 to remove the requirements for acupuncture therapists to wear disposable non-latex gloves should they know that the client whom they are treating is infected with a blood-borne virus. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee considered the instrument at its meeting on 3 February 2026 and made no recommendations in relation to it.

We will have an evidence session with the Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health and supporting officials on the instrument. Once any questions are answered, we will proceed to a formal debate on the motion.

I welcome Jenni Minto, the Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health, and, from the Scottish Government, Lucy Orren, who is a lawyer, and Alun Parry, who is the health protection team leader. I invite the minister to make a brief opening statement.

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak to the draft Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Skin Piercing and Tattooing) Amendment Order 2026. The instrument will amend an order made in 2006 that is used by local authorities to license and inspect any business that provides skin piercing or tattooing in Scotland and which lays out a number of requirements that are aimed at reducing the health risks to the public when accessing such procedures.

The amending order will remove the requirements for acupuncture therapists to wear disposable non-latex gloves when treating someone whom they know to be living with a blood-borne virus. Removing those requirements will remove any doubt for those therapists. It will be clear that they should not feel that they need to ask their client whether they are living with a blood-borne virus, which is a question that some people feel uncomfortable to answer. The amendment will also help to reduce the stigma that people living

with a blood-borne virus might feel when accessing acupuncture treatment.

Other existing requirements to wear disposable non-latex gloves in certain circumstances will remain in place. For example, should the therapist be handling items that are contaminated with blood or bodily fluids, or if they or their client have open lesions, the requirement to wear disposable non-latex gloves will remain. Therapists make the decision on any other reason to wear disposable non-latex gloves through individual risk assessments case by case.

Since the original order came into force in 2006, there have been many advances in the treatment of blood-borne viruses. Vaccinations and antiviral medication mean that people can maintain healthy lives through the treatment options that are available. Those advances mean that transmission of HIV has greatly reduced. The hepatitis B vaccination that is offered today for babies and people who are at high risk provides protection against acquisition, and hepatitis C can also now be cleared with medication in most cases.

I must highlight that acupuncture is considered a low-risk procedure. Should therapists continue to feel that they need to ask their client about blood-borne viruses and treat them differently if they confirm a positive status, that is no longer considered to be justified, given the advances in treatment and the low risk that is posed by the procedure.

Sadly, people living with blood-borne viruses still face forms of stigma every day. The Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee held a focused inquiry in 2024 on the importance of reducing HIV stigma. It heard from people living with HIV in Scotland, who spoke about the stigma that they encounter and its effects, particularly in healthcare settings.

The Scottish Government remains committed to helping to reduce the stigma through promoting the positive impact of effective treatment and prevention that is available today, and by championing the changes that are required to ensure that people who live with blood-borne viruses are not treated any differently from others. The amendment to the 2006 order will assist in ensuring that people are not asked unnecessary questions when they seek treatment and will support us in delivering our commitment.

I can advise that, throughout the consultation, no stakeholders objected to amending the 2006 order to remove the provisions, and no evidence was provided to support further amendments to that order. It is not expected that the amendment will have any detrimental effect on businesses in Scotland.

Thank you for considering the amendment. I request the committee's support to progress the order, and I welcome any questions that you might have to assist in your decision.

11:00

The Convener: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. No member has indicated that they have any questions at this point.

The next agenda item is the formal debate on the instrument on which we have just heard the minister's statement. I remind the committee that officials may not speak in the debate. Minister, I ask you to speak to and move motion S6M-20591.

Jenni Minto: I have nothing to add to my previous statement.

I move,

That the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee recommends that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Skin Piercing and Tattooing) Amendment Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: That concludes consideration of the instrument. The minister and officials are free to leave as the committee continues its work.

National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts and Primary Medical Services Section 17C Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 (SSI 2026/37)

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is consideration of five negative instruments. The first is the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts and Primary Medical Services Section 17C Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026. As part of the 2018 GP contract offer, it was agreed that pharmacotherapy and community treatment and care—CTAC—services would be provided by health board teams rather than GP practices. That arrangement was brought into law in 2022. The purpose of the instrument is to allow health boards to agree with GP practices that those practices will deliver part or some of those services if the health board is having serious difficulties in doing so and if certain criteria are met.

The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee considered the instrument on 10 February and made no recommendations in relation to it. No motion recommending annulment has so far been lodged in relation to the instrument.

As members do not have any comments, I propose that the committee does not make any

recommendations in relation to the instrument. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2026 (SSI 2026/42)

The Convener: The second negative instrument is the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2026, which are to enable local authorities to calculate an appropriate contribution to be charged to residents in residential accommodation for the cost of that accommodation. The purpose of the instrument is to increase the value of savings credit disregard from £8.50 to £8.95 for a single person and from £12.60 to £13.25 for a couple, in line with the increase in average earnings, which is currently forecast at 4.8 per cent; and to increase the lower capital limit from £22,000 to £22,750 and the upper capital limit from £35,500 to £36,750, in line with the consumer prices index rise, which is forecast at 3.8 per cent.

The DPLR Committee considered the instrument on 17 February. It made no recommendations in relation to the instrument but noted that it would be helpful if the approach to rounding off the savings credit disregards was set out in the policy note to explain the difference between the figures and the stated percentage increase. Further background to that is set out in the DPLR Committee correspondence with the Scottish Government. No motion recommending annulment has so far been lodged in relation to the instrument.

As members do not have any comments, I propose that the committee does not make any recommendations in relation to the instrument. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

National Assistance (Sums for Personal Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 (SSI 2026/43)

The Convener: The third negative instrument is the National Assistance (Sums for Personal Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2026, which, as with the previous instrument, are to enable local authorities to calculate an appropriate contribution to be charged to residents in residential accommodation for the cost of that accommodation. The purpose of the instrument is to increase the value of the personal expenses allowance in line with the increase in average earnings, which is 4.8 per cent. The weekly rate of the allowance will increase from £35.90 to £37.65 from 6 April 2026.

The DPLR Committee considered the instrument on 17 February and made no recommendations in relation to it. No motion recommending annulment has so far been lodged in relation to the instrument.

As members do not have any comments, I propose that the committee does not make any recommendations in relation to the instrument. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

National Health Service (Common Staffing Method) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026 (SSI 2026/54)

The Convener: The fourth negative instrument is the National Health Service (Common Staffing Method) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026. The purpose of the instrument is to amend the National Health Service (Common Staffing Method) (Scotland) Regulations 2024, which specify the staffing level and professional judgment tools that must be used as part of the common staffing method for specified kinds of healthcare provision.

The DPLR Committee considered the instrument on 17 February and made no recommendations in relation to it. No motion recommending annulment has so far been lodged in relation to the instrument.

As members do not have any comments, I propose that the committee does not make any recommendations in relation to the instrument. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Cancellation of Registration) Order 2026 (SSI 2026/64)

The Convener: The fifth and final negative instrument that we are considering today is the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Cancellation of Registration) Order 2026. The purpose of the instrument is to prescribe the circumstances, other than following the giving of an improvement notice and the expiry of the period for improvement specified in it, in which the Care Inspectorate may use the power conferred by section 64(1) of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 to propose the cancellation of the registration of a care service that is registered under chapter 3 of part 5 of that act.

The DPLR Committee considered the instrument on 17 February and made no recommendations in relation to it. No motion recommending annulment has so far been lodged in relation to the instrument.

As members do not have any comments, I propose that the committee does not make any recommendations in relation to the instrument. Are members content with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: At our next meeting, we will undertake periodic scrutiny of the work of Public Health Scotland. That concludes the public part of our meeting.

11:06

Meeting continued in private until 11:35.

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