

Levelling the playing field

A report on participation in sport and
physical activity in disadvantaged areas

August 2022



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the Welsh Parliament website: **www.senedd.wales/SeneddCulture**

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport,
and International Relations Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN**

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

Email: **SeneddCulture@senedd.wales**

Twitter: **[@SeneddCultureIR](https://twitter.com/SeneddCultureIR)**

© **Senedd Commission Copyright 2022**

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the Senedd Commission and the title of the document specified.

Levelling the playing field

A report on participation in sport and
physical activity in disadvantaged areas

August 2022



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddCulture

Current Committee membership:



Committee Chair:
Delyth Jewell MS
Plaid Cymru



Hefin David MS
Welsh Labour



Alun Davies MS
Welsh Labour



Heledd Fychan MS
Plaid Cymru



Tom Giffard MS
Welsh Conservatives



Carolyn Thomas MS
Welsh Labour

The following Member attended as a substitute during this inquiry.



Altaf Hussain MS
Welsh Conservatives

Contents

Chair's foreword.....	5
Recommendations	7
1. Background	9
2. Evaluating current policy approach	13
Current policy commitments and requirements	13
Recent policy statements.....	15
Evidence considered.....	15
Our view	18
3. Barriers to participation.....	22
Evidence considered.....	22
Our view	32
4. Funding	37
Welsh Government funding	37
Evidence considered.....	40
Views of those with lived experiences	41
International examples	42
Our view	43
5. Data	47
Data on participation in disadvantaged areas	47
Evidence considered.....	52
Our view	55
Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions.....	58
Annex B: List of written evidence	60
Additional Information	60

Chair's foreword

"Sport can be the nation's most effective preventative health tool"

– Welsh Government, January 2022

As we continue to grapple with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has never been a more important time to put sport and physical activity at the forefront of our nation's physical and mental well-being, nor has the opportunity ever been as apparent. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been offered a chance to look differently at how we live our lives, and indeed what's most important to us, both as a nation and as individuals. We couldn't agree more with the Welsh Government's words to us during our Draft Budget scrutiny session in January 2022, that sport could and *can* be the nation's most effective preventative health tool: this ambition can indeed be made a reality, though there are myriad of challenges in our path that must be overcome before this ambition can be fully realised. The pandemic has offered us a chance to change: we must not take for granted that those positive changes will come about without concerted action.

Our inquiry has considered the many interlinked, nuanced and complicated barriers to accessing sport that face people who are living in disadvantaged areas. And, whilst the pandemic has had an unmatched impact on all our lives, many of the stubborn issues highlighted by our inquiry relating to unequal access to sport existed before February 2020. The World Health Organisation said in 2020 that, globally, 1 in 4 adults did not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity. Before the pandemic, only **32 per cent of adults (16+) participated in a sporting activity three times a week – whilst over 40 per cent participated in no activity**. While overall activity levels have increased since March 2021, the most vulnerable members of our society have reported doing less activity than before the pandemic. This is an extremely worrying trend.

It is common knowledge that leading healthier and more physically active lifestyles can have a tremendously beneficial impact on other measures such as life expectancy, socioeconomic opportunities and educational attainment. It is also acknowledged that lifestyle habits that are developed from a young age are also more likely to continue into adulthood. For these reasons alone, securing a fair and level playing field in terms of participation in sport in Wales could have a dramatic impact on the lives of people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

We heard persuasive evidence from stakeholders that there are a number of barriers facing those in disadvantaged areas from participating in sport and physical activity. These barriers ranged from the suitability of facilities that are available, a lack of safe spaces for doing exercise, reductions in times allocated for sport, and stereotypes that belong in the past. Often, physical barriers can be compounded by less-tangible barriers, relating to our behaviours and biases, including the ways in which society teaches us to have fixed ideas about how “sporty” people should look or behave. Many of the disadvantages facing members of our society when accessing sport will be intersectional in nature, relating to gender, sexuality, race, religion and disability. Moreover, the problems we are highlighting in this report should not be considered as static: the situation has deteriorated markedly in recent weeks and months as a result of the cost of living crisis, and more and more families in the coming months will be faced with the choice of eating or funding their children’s sporting activities.

While there are individual interventions which can be undertaken to address individual barriers, we believe strongly that responsibility for this begins at the top. This means that the Welsh Government must show stronger and clearer leadership on the issue of equal access to sport. The commitments made to date, while laudable in their own right, do not go anywhere near far enough to tackle sports participation in disadvantaged areas.

It is clear to us that the Welsh Government must show greater leadership on this issue, and we are calling for the introduction of a new, national approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas by the Welsh Government. This approach would outline a policy ambition that is specific, with measurable targets to be set against a specific time period. We believe that such an ambition will lead to better collaborative working and better outcomes for those who live in our most disadvantaged areas.

This approach will require agile thinking, and taking advantage of new budgeting processes that will put funding for sport in disadvantaged areas on a more sustainable, longer term footing (instead of the more piecemeal approach that’s occurred to date). It will also require significant additional funding to tackle some of the biggest challenges highlighted in our report.

We believe strongly that, if the recommendations in our report are realised, this will result in transformative practices, and will mean that the Welsh Government’s laudable ambition of sport being seen as a preventative tool (in terms of health, education and numerous other inequalities) will finally be fully realised.

Delyth Jewell MS

Committee Chair of Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government introduce a new national approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. This approach should bring together existing work and good practice that is already taking place as well as introduce new ideas to contribute to this approach. This should include measurable targets, set against a defined time period of five years, to ensure that there is equity in access to participating in sport and physical activity.Page 21

Recommendation 2. We recommend that the Welsh Government urgently provide additional project funding to Sport Wales to enable it to undertake work to identify and deliver opportunities that enable those from disadvantaged groups to benefit from sport and physical activity.Page 33

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund the opening up of school facilities in disadvantaged areas to increase opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in those areas. This should be done as follows:

- i. The Welsh Government should review the findings of the different pilots that are taking place with regards to opening schools for wider community use and report and publish a response to this work by no later than July 2023.
- ii. Work with local authorities to undertake a Wales-wide audit of school sport, leisure and physical activity facilities to identify what exists what is the state of these facilities. This should include considering how accessible these facilities are in terms of travel method, including pay special attention to the location of Welsh-medium schools in relation to the community they serve.
- iii. Following completion of this audit, the Welsh Government should identify the areas that require the most urgent support to ensure equity of access to sport and physical activity opportunities and provide the appropriate funding levels to make it happen. Page 35

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund the opening up of community facilities in disadvantaged areas to increase opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in those areas. This should be done as follows:

- i. Work with local authorities, schools, leisure facility providers and sports clubs to undertake a Wales-wide audit of these facilities to identify what exists, and what is

the state of these facilities. This should include considering how accessible these facilities are in terms of safety of access routes, and travel method.

- ii. Following completion of this audit, the Welsh Government should identify the areas that require the most urgent support to ensure equity of access to sport and physical activity opportunities and provide the appropriate funding levels to make it happen.
..... Page 36

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that programmes for funding sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas are placed on longer term funding cycles.....Page 43

Recommendation 6. We recommend that the Welsh Government significantly increase the funding available for addressing participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas.Page 44

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government and Sport Wales commission an independent review of the impact of the new investment approach on participation in disadvantaged areas in three years' time.....Page 45

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Government set up a pilot scheme for a Physical Activity Development Grant, using lessons learnt from the "Active Me – Kia Tū" pilot in New Zealand, in order to improve access for those in disadvantaged areas to access sport and physical activity opportunities.Page 46

Recommendation 9. We recommend that Sport Wales ensures that future National School Sports Survey data is made available in an open source format to provide increased insight in order to ensure better equity of access to sport in disadvantaged areas. ...Page 56

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government and Sport Wales consider how it can gather qualitative data in order to provide better insight into the issues facing sports participation in disadvantaged areas.....Page 56

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund, and Sport Wales then pilot, and roll out a full, regular survey of adult sports participation.Page 57

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government consider how it can bring together different sources of data related to sports participation in disadvantaged areas and make it publicly available in one place.....Page 57

1. Background

- 1.** During the Fifth Senedd, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee was responsible for scrutinising the Welsh Government in relation to sport, including its main sponsored body, Sport Wales. Since the formation of our committee in June 2021, all matters relating to sport fall within our remit.
- 2.** Sport Wales has published analysis¹ of sports and activity participation in the 12 months immediately prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown. This showed that in 2019/20 (just prior to the pandemic) that 32 per cent of adults (16+) participated in a sporting activity three times a week or more (808,000 people). Nearly half of all people (49 per cent) participated in such activity less than once a week (1,246,000). Moreover, 41 per cent of adults had not participated in any sporting activity (1,040,000 people) in the previous four weeks.
- 3.** The number of people participating in a sporting activity three times a week or more is a national indicator for the *Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015*.² This had increased from 29 per cent in 2016-17 to 32 per cent in 2017-18, then remained at 32 per cent for 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- 4.** Meanwhile, 42 per cent of pupils attending schools with the highest number of pupils eligible for free school meals take part three or more times a week (in addition to timetabled physical education lessons). This figure compares with 55 per cent of pupils at schools with the smallest number of pupils eligible for free school meals.³
- 5.** Sport Wales worked with Savanta ComRes to get an insight into the nation's activity habits and behaviours during the Covid-19 pandemic, and conducted four surveys. Overall activity levels have increased since March 2021 and the majority of adults now report doing more activity than before the pandemic. However, older adults, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those with a long-standing condition or illness are still more likely to report doing less activity than they were before the pandemic.
- 6.** Professor Melitta McNarry, a professor of sport and exercise sciences from Swansea University had told us in 2021 that:

¹ [National Survey of Wales 2019-20](#)

² <https://gov.wales/wellbeing-wales-national-indicators>

³ [2018 Sport Wales National School Sports Survey](#)

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

*"there are major issues in terms of participation and the inequalities that have been exacerbated through the pandemic. We know that older adults, women, girls and those from a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to now be participating in activity than those in other groups."*⁴

Terms of reference

7. It is within this context that in January 2022, we agreed to undertake an inquiry into participation in sport in disadvantaged areas. The term "sport" reflects all types of sport and physical activity⁵. We agreed that the particular focus of the inquiry should consider the following:

- What are the main barriers to participation in sport in disadvantaged areas? How do these intersect with other factors including:
 - Age,
 - Sex and gender,
 - Socioeconomic status,
 - Geography,
 - Disability,
 - Ethnicity.
- How clear a picture do we have of current participation levels in disadvantaged areas? Does the current data enable policy interventions to be effective?
- How should public funding be used to increase participation in disadvantaged areas?
- How effective are current interventions at increasing participation in disadvantaged areas?
- Has the pandemic caused any persistent changes to participation levels in disadvantaged areas?

⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 20 October 2021 paragraph 168

⁵ The Committee has inserted the term "physical activity" into the title of this report for clarity purposes.

- How effectively do different sectors (e.g. education and health) collaborate to improve participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?
- Are there examples of best practice, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales should learn from to increase participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

Definition of disadvantaged areas

8. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation⁶ (WIMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It identifies areas with the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation. We have used the term “disadvantaged” in the title of this inquiry in an attempt to reduce stigmatisation with regards to the term “deprived” or “deprivation”.

9. Deprivation is the lack of access to opportunities and resources which we might expect in our society. This can be in terms of material goods or the ability of an individual to participate in the normal social life of the community.

10. WIMD is currently made up of eight separate domains (or types) of deprivation. These are income, employment, health, education, access to services, community safety, physical environment and housing.

11. The WIMD does not provide a measure of the level of deprivation in an area, but rather whether an area is more or less deprived relative to all other areas in Wales. People that would be considered deprived can live in the least deprived areas and vice versa.

Gathering evidence for the inquiry

12. From 7 February 2022 to 18 March 2022 we ran a public consultation. We received 15 written responses, representing the views of organisations ranging from advocacy organisations to different sports’ governing bodies. In addition to the written evidence, we received oral evidence from a range of different witnesses. An outline of both the written and oral evidence considered for this inquiry can be found in annexes A and B of this report.

13. We also undertook a visit to north Wales where we met different sporting organisations to understand the issues they face in terms of getting people to participate in their sports. The Committee also undertook a series of one to one interviews with 14 different actors within the sports sector in order to identify the issues they encounter while participating in sport in disadvantaged areas.

⁶ <https://wimd.gov.wales/>

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

14. Finally, we considered how other countries tackle the issue of participation in sports in disadvantaged areas.

15. We would like to thank every person and organisation who took the time to contribute to this inquiry.

2. Evaluating current policy approach

16. There are a number of ways in which the Welsh Government delivers its sports and physical activity priorities. It is mainly done however through its sponsored body, Sport Wales. There are also other policy initiatives within specific government departments, such as Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales which is run through Sport Wales in conjunction with Public Health Wales.

Current policy commitments and requirements

Programme for Government commitments

17. Following the formation of the current Welsh Government in May 2021, it published its Programme for Government which said that it will:

- Promote equal access to sports and support young and talented athletes and grassroots clubs.
- Invest in our world-class sports facilities.
- Invest in new facilities such as 4G pitches.

Sport Wales remit letter

18. The Welsh Government sets out its priorities for sport in its remit letter to Sport Wales. This outlines what Sport Wales should do with the funding provided to it by government. The most recent remit letter for Sport Wales was published on 22 December 2021. For the first time, this is a “term of government” remit letter, meaning it lasts the length of the government’s term between 2021-2026. Remit letters have previously been issued on an annual basis. The letter includes the requirement to:

“Ensure that the broadest range of vulnerable groups can engage with sport and physical activity in Wales and are not excluded from participation. This should include identifying and delivering specific opportunities that enable people in vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and those in under-represented communities to benefit from sport and physical activity.”⁷

⁷ <https://gov.wales/sport-wales-remit-letter-2021-2026>

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

19. Sport Wales's 2021-2026 remit letter also includes a number of expectations that could relate to increasing participation in disadvantaged areas. These are:

- Prioritise diversity, inclusion and equality throughout the sector to ensure we understand and overcome barriers to participation;
- Further develop your network of Regional Sports Partnerships to positively respond to local inequalities and promote sport and activity for all;
- Continue to support, fund and work with organisations that bring the views and life experiences of under-represented groups impacted by your work into your decision making;
- Improve Sport Wales's engagement with under-represented communities.

20. The remit letter also includes targets related to looked after children and care leavers; D/deaf communities; and for those living with disabilities.

Well-being and Future Generations Act

21. The *Well-being of Future Generations Act* requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

22. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals⁸. The Act makes it clear that listed public bodies must work to achieve all of the goals, not just one or two. We consider that a number of these goals – most notably “a more equal Wales”, “a healthier Wales” and “a Wales of cohesive communities” – seem relevant to the terms of reference of our inquiry.

Socioeconomic duty

23. In March 2021, the socio-economic Duty⁹ was commenced, placing a statutory commitment on Welsh Ministers, and certain public bodies, to ensure their strategic decision-making considers socio-economic disadvantage.

⁸ <https://gov.wales/wellbeing-wales-2021>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/socio-economic-duty-overview>

Recent policy statements

24. As part of our inquiry on priorities for the Sixth Senedd, Sport Wales told us that it “would like to contribute more across portfolios to tackle inequality, improve public health and increase community cohesion”.¹⁰

25. The Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip, Dawn Bowden MS, (“the Deputy Minister”) also told us on 13 October 2021 that:

*“I want to see far more people involved in sport and activity at a community level, because that is very much part of our health and well-being agenda. So, those would be the two key things, I think, in terms of the elite performance and involvement and activity in sport at more of a community level.”*¹¹

26. At the same meeting, the Deputy Minister said:

*“I want to see more young people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, or from deprived communities, being involved in our arts, in our sports, in our cultural sector. That will be measurable in terms of has that been achieved.”*¹²

27. In its written evidence on the Draft Budget 2022-23, the Welsh Government told us that:

*“Sport can be the nation's most effective preventative health tool but greater cross-sector prioritisation is needed to create the long-term sustainable shifts in participation.”*¹³

Evidence considered

28. In its written evidence to the inquiry, the Welsh Government told us how important sport is to the national life of Wales. Alongside the influence that sport can have on identity, it told us that “Sport is also key to our health and well-being as a nation with our vision of an active nation where everyone can have a lifetime enjoyment of sport”.¹⁴

29. During our evidence session, the Deputy Minister told us that the adverse impacts of Covid-19 pandemic were felt by everyone, but those in the areas of highest deprivation were hit

¹⁰ CCWLSIR Inquiry into Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

¹¹ CCWLSIR meeting 13 October 2021, paragraph 184

¹² CCWLSIR meeting 13 October 2021, paragraph 101

¹³ Written evidence to CCWLSIR on Draft Budget 2022-23

¹⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, Welsh Government written evidence

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

the worst.¹⁵ She added that the Welsh Government had introduced measures, such as the Summer of Fun and the Winter of Wellbeing, to try and address those participation gaps. This includes allocation £7million for Summer of Fun activities throughout this year's summer holidays (2022).

30. In terms of participation, the Deputy Minister spoke about the importance of "getting kids involved in activity that they perhaps wouldn't otherwise get involved in, because they might not necessarily want to be involved in team sport". She added that "ultimately the objective for participation is about physical activity, mental well-being, and that is not necessarily always delivered by organised team sports".¹⁶

31. During a discussion on collaborative working, the Deputy Minister told us that an important theme "is about how do we work across departments, collaboratively, to deliver all these objectives, because none of them are done in isolation in each particular department". She noted that work was actively taking place across ministerial portfolios and the challenge is "how we maximise facilities that we already have for the wider community".¹⁷

32. During both their written and oral evidence, Sport Wales highlighted several key policies intended to increase participation in disadvantaged areas. This includes changing the way it invests in sport to reflect sports' contributions to Sport Wales priorities. Assistant Director Owen Hathway explained:

*"we invest in sports and partners based on that data, and other data, that shows us the size and scale of a partner's ability to have an impact, looking at things like participation and demand. But we also weight things specifically around inequality—so what's their size and scale of impacts when it comes to women and girls, ethnic minority backgrounds, disabilities, and, indeed, deprivation."*¹⁸

33. In terms of collaboration, Sport Wales said:

"how do we ensure that funding that is already in the education system and health system is being used to drive outcomes with sport as the vehicle. It doesn't necessarily have to be more money for sport or Sport Wales, but how do we use funding that's already in the system and prioritise to deliver the

¹⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 176

¹⁶ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 176

¹⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 261

¹⁸ CCWLSIR meeting 16 March 2022, paragraph 70

outcomes that those sectors want, but using sport as that vehicle for educational attainment or preventative health agendas?"¹⁹

34. Another key change in approach led by Sport Wales is the delivery of sport activities through regional partnerships. The first regional partnership, Sport North Wales, begun its work earlier this year. Sport Wales Acting Chief Executive Brian Davies told us that:

"Sport on its own isn't the biggest tool. Sport together with education, health, housing and higher education can make a massive difference, and that's what we're trying to do with our regional partnerships".²⁰

35. The Youth Sports Trust called for "a joined-up Government strategy that demonstrates the importance of physical education, physical activity and school sport". Emily Reynolds, National Programmes Director, told us that:

"the bigger question for this is: what is the strategy for children and young people in school sport and in the community, or is the wider strategy—not a Sport Wales strategy, but what is the ambition for every child in Wales in terms of physical education, school sport and physical activity, to enable the Sport Wales strategy and the actions of all partners to be able to achieve that? At the moment, that's probably the gap that I think is missing, so that everybody can work towards and collaborate fully on the ambitions for every child in Wales in terms of not just numbers of minutes, but the approach to the experiences and the opportunities that they should be able to access."²¹

36. Professor Melitta McNarry, a professor of sport and exercise sciences at Swansea University, made a similar point to us. She noted that despite physical activity being mentioned in policy documents, it is rarely the focus or a key indicator of success. She elaborated on this point by telling us:

"We really do need to start joining up policies and having policies that work to address these multiple things, using probably a whole-system approach, and thereby accounting for the fact that not one of those things happens in isolation. So, we can't just take education, we can't just take health and then look to treat them independently; we need to start looking at their

¹⁹ CCWLSIR meeting 16 March, paragraph 119

²⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 16 March 2022, paragraph 97

²¹ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022 paragraph 142

intersections and interactions to get the greatest gains in the shortest period of time, and for the best cost-effectiveness, as well.”²²

37. The Deputy Minister told us that “I’m not totally sold on targets because I think targets can sometimes drive you in the wrong direction”.²³

38. The Welsh Government’s written evidence noted that it plans to host a Sport Summit later this year “with a key focus on exploring how sport can drive increased participation in our most disadvantaged communities and with our harder to reach groups”.²⁴

Our view

39. From the evidence we have considered, it is clear to us that the Welsh Government’s approach is insufficient to tackle the enormous challenge facing participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. That is not to say the different goals and commitments already in place are not well intentioned – we believe that individually they could make a difference. However, we are concerned that there is not a clear and defined approach and well-funded strategy at the top of government. And, without this clear defined approach and strategy, the impacts of those individual commitments will not be enough to move the dial on participation in disadvantaged areas.

40. We believe that the evidence we have considered shows that there is no clear overarching goal and approach being set by the Welsh Government on this matter. The Programme for Government includes a brief commitment to providing equal access to sports. Sport Wales’s remit letter includes an important requirement to ensuring vulnerable groups are not excluded from participating in sport. In addition to this, there are several cross-departmental initiatives being run by the Welsh Government which fall under the broader banner of sport and physical activity. These include the “Healthy and Active Fund” run by the Welsh Government, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales, as well as the “Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales” strategy. Again, we are of the view that these are laudable schemes, but we are not convinced how the success of this cumulative action would be measured.

41. The measuring of this action is even more important during a period where there are pressures on living costs. As outlined in the previous chapter, increased living costs are having an impact on whether some are able to participate in sport and physical activity. We think that providing that equity of access to sport is important, no more so than at this current time when

²² CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022 paragraph 263

²³ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 220

²⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, Welsh Government written evidence

some will be facing tough choices on what they can and cannot afford to pay for. Being able to measure this will ensure that we know how successful the Welsh Government has been in this area as well as inform where additional support is required.

42. We heard of several examples of different initiatives and approaches either being undertaken, such as community programmes, or others in their early stages of development, for example, the Sport North Wales partnership. However it seems to us that these are activities and projects working broadly separately from one another. We think that without a clear overarching approach set from the top of the government, the success of these projects will not be fully realised.

43. Several stakeholders also discussed with us of the need to reframe the policy approach to participation in sport in disadvantaged areas. Emily Reynolds of the Youth Sports Trust questioned “what is the ambition... [to] ensure that the broadest range of vulnerable groups can engage with sport and physical activity in Wales and are not excluded from participation.”²⁵ Professor Melitta McNarry told us of the need for a “whole systems approach” where everyone works together towards a common goal. We think that there are pockets of good practice taking place in Wales at the moment, but we don’t believe that it is joined up.²⁶

44. During scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2022-23 in January 2021, the Welsh Government told us that:

“Sport can be the nation’s most effective preventative health tool but greater cross-sector prioritisation is needed to create the long-term sustainable shifts in participation.”

45. To date, we have seen limited evidence of this approach. The Welsh Government told us that in addition to funding provided through the Arts and Sport budgets, the Health department also provided funding to Sport Wales. This sum ranged from c.£1.5million in 2019/20 to £1.6million in 2021/22. This is a miniscule sum in the context of broader health budget. We would even go far as to suggest that this is a paltry amount considering the statements that have been made.

46. We think that there also needs to be a shift in the messaging around participating in sport and being physically active. In a previous committee hearing, Baroness Grey-Thompson (incoming Chair of Sport Wales) told us that “we need to have more people who are just not very good at sport... it’s okay to be not very good at sport and just have fun and participate and

²⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022 paragraph 156

²⁶ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022 paragraphs 262-263

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

be active.”²⁷ Whilst these comments were not provided as part of this inquiry, we do think that there is a powerful message at the heart of Baroness Grey-Thompson’s words which should form a part of future work in this area. We think that sport should be enjoyable for all. It should not just be about being competitive and winning, it should also include having fun with friends and family. We think that such messaging will help increase people’s confidence in engaging with sport and physical activity. As outlined later on in the report, there is a strong link between confidence and participation in sport.

47. Finally, we think that successful public policy delivery is a combination of two things working in tandem. It is a set of good ideas that can produce positive outcomes on a specific group of the population that can be measured. It also requires broad buy-in from stakeholders who need to feel ownership of the policy.

48. For these reasons, we recommend that a new national collaborative approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas is introduced by the Welsh Government. This approach would outline a policy ambition that is specific with measurable targets, which would be set against a defined time period, over a five year period. This would mean everyone, every agency and government department working towards this one common goal. It would provide a clear direction of travel with everyone working in unison to deliver that change.

49. We would like to be clear that this wouldn’t mean starting again. It would mean that the Welsh Government should set an explicit ambition for participation in sport and physical activity with clear, achievable targets over a defined time period. This should include a headline aim set from the very start. It would mean bringing together good practice that already exists and ensuring that it is joined up for the benefit of achieving the ambition set out by the Welsh Government.

50. As already noted, the Welsh Government has previously told us that sport and physical activity can have a great impact as a preventative health tool, but we maintain that this requires better collaboration. The Welsh Government has also acknowledged that the most disadvantaged areas were impacted most by the pandemic. We know that a lack of regular exercise and low levels of physical activity “can have negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of individuals.”²⁸ Weightlifting coach Ray Williams has previously spoken of the public health benefits of exercise that have been brought home by the pandemic:

²⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 2 March 2022, paragraph 26

²⁸ World Health Organisation briefing on staying physically active during self-quarantine

"We can use this tragedy to make Wales a fitter and healthier nation that is more able to fight chronic illness in the future."²⁹

51. Failing to seize upon the opportunity provided by the pandemic, whereby participation gaps widened amongst the most in need in society, would be a missed opportunity. It would furthermore be a missed chance to try and eradicate the barriers that prevent people living in the most disadvantaged areas from trying to access sport and physical activity.

52. All other recommendations and conclusions we make from this inquiry will be intended to assist with this overarching recommendation.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government introduce a new national approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. This approach should bring together existing work and good practice that is already taking place as well as introduce new ideas to contribute to this approach. This should include measurable targets, set against a defined time period of five years, to ensure that there is equity in access to participating in sport and physical activity.

²⁹ <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/coronavirus-sport/>

3. Barriers to participation

53. In its written evidence to the inquiry, Sport Wales told us that:

*"Broadly, the main barriers to sport may be structural, institution, personal or social – and in almost all instances, are made up of a combination of these. These barriers impact on people from ethnic minorities, migrants, those with disabilities, elderly people, children, women and girls and people who are gender diverse and often these issues are not isolated but intersectional in their nature. Typically, communities in disadvantaged areas have a higher rate of these inequalities."*³⁰

54. Sport Wales also noted that when one of these characteristics intersects with another, "equitable opportunities for participation may be less, with the quality of experience less favourable".³¹ Aled Lewis, Head of Football Development at the FAW, suggested that accessibility within disadvantaged communities covers a broad spectrum of issues such as affordability, opportunities, access to travel and so forth.³²

55. We considered the different barriers throughout the course of the inquiry. A summary of the evidence we heard is outlined under the relevant subheading below. Quotes and statements from interviewees highlighted in this chapter arise from our engagement work which can be found in our **Engagement findings Participation in sports in disadvantaged areas**.

Evidence considered

Age

56. We received several responses which noted that ensuring that older people can remain fit and active is incredibly important. Reasons for this included improving health, reducing loneliness and improving mental health.

57. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales told us of numerous different ways that older people participate in sport. For example, older people may be active in local sporting organisations in a different way, such as through volunteering or supporting, not just through taking part in a game. However, only 25 per cent of those aged 65-74 in Wales participate in

³⁰ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

³¹ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

³² [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 4 May 2022 paragraph 48

sporting activities three or more times a week. This figure reduces by a further ten per cent for over 75 age and over. The Commissioner has suggested to us that we need more “age-friendly” communities:

“One of the key barriers facing older people’s participation in sport is their own physical health and fitness -31 per cent of people aged over 65 in Wales have noted that they would do more sport if they were fitter..... 55 per cent of those aged between 65-74 say they never walk more than 10 minutes to get somewhere, which rises to 68 per cent for those aged 75 and over. Whilst for some older people, this will be due to an illness or health condition, it can also be down to whether their local environment is one that supports them to get out and about.”³³

58. One interviewee in our inquiry told us that older people “feel forgotten and that needs to end.” They added that “taking part in sporting activities helps loneliness and gets them socialising”.

59. Emily Reynolds from Youth Sports Trust told us that one of the biggest barriers to participating in sport is the reduction in time allocated to physical education between primary and secondary education, at the expense of other subjects like numeracy. Whilst this might not be directly linked to areas of disadvantage generally, “the knock-on consequence of that is that young people from areas of disadvantage get fewer opportunities in school”.³⁴

60. A gymnastics club told us that “it is important to start sport at a young age as it helps develop patterns for a lifetime” but that there is “significant drop off in participation between ages of 12-16”.³⁵

Gender

61. Witnesses noted that a lack of safe spaces for women and girls, and the use of negative language when talking about women and girls participating in sports were clear barriers. One participant told us:

“We’ve spent the last four or five months consulting with women and girls from across all areas of the game - from grassroots, all the way up to the top of the game about their lived experiences and some of the key things that are

³³ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

³⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 114

³⁵ Note following visit to gymnastics club 19 May 2022

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

coming out is fear of judgement. They don't like training and playing when all of the boys' teams are watching them because they're lacking in confidence."

62. According to Urdd Gobaith Cymru, how sport is perceived by girls over 16 years of age in deprived areas is a concern. Their recently established “#FelMerch” project targets girls because “having got to secondary school, don’t participate as much in sport.” They have seen an increase recently in their girls rugby sevens competition. As Jo Jones, South Wales Regional Manager at Urdd Gobaith Cymru told us, the next step is to consider “how we can establish hubs within communities and work with secondary schools, colleges and universities to ensure that these young women do have access to sporting activities”.³⁶

63. Colleges Wales told us that in further education “gender is a significant factor in participation in sports in disadvantaged areas”. Reasons for this includes “girls’ motivation and enjoyment of sport reduces throughout adolescence and often negative attitudes towards sport are formed”.³⁷

Geography

64. Travel and location of sport and physical activity opportunities can also present a barrier to participation. A number of participants noted this can present itself in a number of ways, such as rural locations, frequency of public transport provision and what is situated in their local community.

65. Mark Lawrie, Chief Executive of StreetGames told us “that most young people who access community sports provision in disadvantaged communities don’t travel much further than a mile to do that”.³⁸

66. Swim Wales noted that of around 500 pools in Wales, the majority are located in the south. Therefore access in west and north Wales is predicated on the availability and affordability of travel options.³⁹

Disability

67. Fiona Reid, Chief Executive of Disability Sport Wales, told us that there are wide societal barriers that reduce disabled people’s ability to participate in team sports. These included issues around access and being able to travel to activity. Fiona Reid stated that “where people are

³⁶ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 8 June 2022, paragraph 180

³⁷ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

³⁸ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 8 June 2022, paragraph 30

³⁹ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 4 May 2022, paragraph 143

active, access is generally good; where people aren't active, then access is often one of the most significant barriers".⁴⁰

Powerchair Football (case study from Wrexham AFC)

Wrexham AFC run a powerchair football programme.

Powerchair football which is the only active team participation sport for people who use electric wheelchairs. A fast-paced, dynamic game, the unique nature of the sport allows all ages (from six years up), disabilities and genders to compete together. The game uses a larger, 33cm diameter ball and matches – which take place on a 30m x 18m indoor court – are played on a four versus four basis.

68. Participants in our interviews felt that barriers for people with disabilities were emphasised when attempting to participate in sports and many potential opportunities were not available due to lack of accessibility. One interviewee said:

"When it comes to disability the playing field is so unfair. Depending on your disability you just won't get the same opportunities. Even something simple as popping to the shops/going to the pub has so many barriers... so you can just imagine the barriers in sports – accessibility, toilets, need for carers etc."

Ethnicity

69. Mojeid Ilyas, Diverse Communities Development Officer at Cricket Wales, told us that finding safe space due to cultural and religious reasons can pose a barrier, especially amongst women's cricket in ethnic minority communities. However, by targeting these groups with measures that provide better access, they have seen an increase in participation.⁴¹

70. Matthew Williams, Head of Policy at the Welsh Sports Association, told us that intersecting characteristics can create further drawback:

*"You're much more likely to be living in poverty if you are from an ethnic minority background, you're much more likely to be living in poverty if you're a single mother with children, and those kinds of things."*⁴²

⁴⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 36

⁴¹ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 108

⁴² CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 222

71. Participants in our interviews noted the lack of participation in some sports resulted in some poor life skills:

"95 per cent of black adults and 93 per cent of Asian adults do not swim. Why is that relevant? Well, a high proportion of the BAME population live within 1 kilometre of waterways, so lakes, reservoirs, canals, rivers, you name it. It's above the national average. And this is the same community that has very little or no water safety knowledge."

Cost of living

72. One of the key themes that emerged during our discussions was the impact of the cost of living crisis. Many of the coaches interviewed for the inquiry pointed out that the cost of living crisis had a deeper impact on everyday life in disadvantaged areas and that this had a clear knock-on effect on participation in sports.

73. Mark Lawrie from StreetGames told us that an average family living in poverty will spend about £3.75 per week on sport and active leisure. He noted that this was a 2019 figure, therefore it must be lower by now.⁴³ Professor Melitta McNarry told us that she'd seen some information that showed the average amount spent in deprived areas was £1.50 per week compared with £10 in more well-off areas⁴⁴. As an illustration to this, one coach told us that:

"I think we will see a huge amount of issues from the cost of living crisis. What comes first, do you eat or do you play rugby? £15 is huge for some families, kids travelling to away games – petrol costs are huge. It's bound to have a lasting effect."

74. Another coach raised concerns that if the cost of sports participation continues to go upwards, and you "do not reinvest the funds in the right way. I do think you will see a long term impact of this which ultimately affects young people being able to participate".

75. The Welsh Sports Association told us that the crisis is not only hitting families but also sports providers themselves. These impacts include energy costs, resource costs (i.e. chemicals in swimming pools) and staffing costs all becoming more expensive. This is on top of forthcoming inflationary pressures.⁴⁵

⁴³ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 12

⁴⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 221

⁴⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 263

76. One gymnastics club told us that their “main overheads are in rent and energy costs...if our energy costs double, it will threaten our ability to continue...if they treble, it will cripple us”. They did also note that if they could upgrade heaters and lights, this would reduce their energy costs by half.⁴⁶

Socioeconomic status

77. Whilst factors such as the rise in the cost of living had a profound impact on participants from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, other themes also emerged. One interviewee told us:

“We play some clubs from the more affluent areas who have both parents and grandparents there an hour early. Our kids don't have that luxury; it's like we need a culture change in society.”

78. Another told us that:

“It's an unfair playing field for our kids. Playing rugby against these other clubs is one of the only times these kids will be playing on level playing fields whether that be health, education or even life expectancy.”

79. Many of the interviewees noted that it was clear that people's socioeconomic status could affect their ability to participate in sports and that it was crucial to work on keeping sports accessible. One interviewee said:

“I have seen kids that have had to sit out – and it's horrible to see kids/mums not being able to take part because they can't afford it. How is getting defined by your postcode fair? Sport should be a level playing field.”

80. It was also noted how some inner-city communities had bespoke issues that affected people's participation which included crime, culture and religion:

“There are clear tensions in disadvantaged areas of the city which affect participation. There are loads of issues when teams go and play in rival areas of the city. We have seen stabbings take place, and young people are too scared to go and play a game of sports due to the gang culture of the city.”

⁴⁶ Note following visit to gymnastics club 19 May 2022

Facilities

81. Participants in our interviews told us of the impact that a lack of suitable facilities has on participation in sports. In some cases, this meant that certain audiences felt excluded from sports, in particular women and ethnic minority communities. One interviewee said in relation to girls sports facilities that:

"It's their basic needs aren't catered for in the facilities. There is nothing that tells a young girl that she doesn't belong in football than walking into a changing room and there are five stinking urinals and maybe one seated toilet where the lock doesn't work and the toilet seat is falling off and there are no sanitary bins. Girls are telling us that when they're on their period, they won't be going to training or they won't be playing football."

82. StreetGames told us that facilities can present barriers in a different way:

"the barrier that exists around having the right offer for young people who live in disadvantaged communities, because our experience is that they often want a different offer to the traditional sports club; they want an informal offer that's fun, that they can access with their friends and that, most importantly, is on their doorstep, is outside where they live, because of all the other barriers that they face."⁴⁷

83. Aled Lewis from the FAW told us that far greater investment is required across all sports in Wales, in particular in disadvantaged communities. This is ensure that facilities are of good quality but "also at a low cost as well so that the cost of access to those facilities isn't a barrier".⁴⁸ Noel Mooney, Chief Executive at the FAW, told us that "our grass-roots facilities are absolutely disgraceful here. I'm really shocked by how bad the facilities are here".⁴⁹

84. Access costs can be mitigated however when some collaboration takes place. Jo Jones from Urdd Gobaith Cymru told us that due to strong partnerships with two schools in one area, there is no cost attached to using the schools' facilities "which is excellent". Her colleague Gary Lewis, Director of Sport and Apprenticeships, mentioned that "schools do have excellent facilities at the moment, and they have to open their doors after 15:30 without it costing a fortune, and it

⁴⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 18

⁴⁸ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 48

⁴⁹ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 58

needs to be available on weekends too. They're local to young people".⁵⁰ This notion was backed by Professor Melitta McNarry who said:

*"making schools community hubs is a very sensible use of available resources.. rather than trying to provide new facilities, using the facilities we already have and widening access to them is a much more cost-effective and, you would therefore hope, sustainable approach to promoting community cohesion, but also physical activity and sport participation."*⁵¹

85. Brian Davies of Sport Wales told us that work was underway to widen access to school facilities across the community:

*"There is a programme in place currently looking at beyond the school day and what can be done. We've got 12 pilot schools on board across Wales, looking at how we can maximise those facilities for wider than educational use."*⁵²

86. Matthew Williams of the Welsh Sports Association reminded us of manifesto commitment in 2016 to open up school facilities beyond the school day for sports to gain access. He noted withstanding the pandemic, progress has been slow on this but that they are looking forward to seeing the results of the pilots.⁵³

87. CollegesWales told us that a number of institutions have invested heavily in new facilities. These facilities are open to local communities and schools and provide employment and quality learning spaces for students.⁵⁴

88. The Deputy Minister told us that "school facilities should be available to the community". She noted that while control over schools lies with the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, as well as the school governing bodies themselves, the Welsh Government can have influence:

"Where we can have more direct influence is where there is direct grant funding to schools... direct Government funding through what was previously twenty-first century schools, where we've seen—I've seen it in my own constituency—and where we've now got schools that have benefited from

⁵⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 116

⁵¹ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 238

⁵² CCWLSIR meeting 16 March 2022, paragraph 121

⁵³ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 238

⁵⁴ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

*that direct funding, and have really got state-of-the-art sports facilities...And those schools are opening up their doors to the local community... Afon Tâf High School is a classic case... they've got fantastic sport facilities, and they do open it up to the community, and Active Merthyr Tydfil use it regularly... that is the model that we should be aiming for."*⁵⁵

Volunteers and staff

89. The role of both volunteers and staff in sport and physical activity play an important role. This ranges from coaching to arranging activity logistics to preparing hospitality. We heard from several stakeholders how critical both staff and volunteers are in sports participation.

90. Interviewees in our inquiry spoke of the positive impact volunteer coaches and role models can have and the invaluable role they play in supporting participation in sports. This value was illustrated by one participant:

"If you offered me £10k right now or ten dedicated volunteers, then I would pick the volunteers every time. They are priceless and the unseen work they do in supporting participation in sports is unbelievable."

91. Urdd Gobaith Cymru told us that volunteering systems can create other opportunities. They told us of one example in a school in Abertillery where older age school pupils volunteering in school worked as part of a programme of extending the school day. This had an additional benefit to Urdd Gobaith Cymru as they were also looking at ways of developing the language across the school and the community.⁵⁶

92. The real impact of losing volunteers was discussed by Disability Sport Wales, using the Covid-19 pandemic as an example:

*"During that period, a number of volunteers were, obviously, removed from the types of activity that they were used to providing, and haven't necessarily returned to facilitating activity."*⁵⁷

93. Several governing bodies who spoke to us outlined how important volunteers were to their respective sports. Aled Lewis from FAW told us that "almost every community in

⁵⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 203

⁵⁶ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 118-121

⁵⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 78

Wales...are driven by a fantastic network of volunteers".⁵⁸ While Phil John, Vice Chair of Basketball Wales, told us that their "board are all volunteers...the sport is driven by volunteers".⁵⁹

94. Staffing was another key area that was discussed by many witnesses. StreetGames told us how important having the right staff in the right place is to the success of any work related to sport or physical activity:

*"The two critical bits for us are also about the right workforce—so, having the right local people who connect well with children and young people in these communities, who understand their lives, and people like them, if those people aren't there, if they're not supported, if they're not able to be supported with training, then that becomes really tricky."*⁶⁰

Role models

95. Role models can play an important part in all walks of life, including sport and physical activity. They can affect the way people behave through providing motivation and inspiration. This is no more important in disadvantaged areas as a number of witnesses told us.

96. One participant in our engagement work told us of the power of international sporting stars can have on a local level in terms of sports participation:

"As well as those local role models having inspirational and accessible role models help. Someone like Marnus Labuschagne who plays for Glamorgan we try and use them 100%. Marnus has just come from Pakistan and we work closely with the south Asian community. For example, he is facing Afridi, the Pakistan fast bowler this week and the interest has been massive. We are running an event in Grange pavilions in May as well. It helps when you have those world-class players young people can look up to."

97. Role models also don't need to be superstars within their respective fields. All participants in our interviews agreed that having the right role models in place within disadvantaged areas was crucial in enabling people to participate in sports. One interviewee told us that:

"I feel like I am more than their coach, you become a role model. Having positive role models is crucial to participation, especially at certain ages where there is a drop-off, 14/15-year-olds. You tend to lose kids from certain areas

⁵⁸ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 47

⁵⁹ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraphs 172-179

⁶⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 17

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

to alcohol, social circles change, crime and drugs. I have been there and done that."

98. Participants felt that positive role models have a significantly positive impact on some groups, such as women and girls, black and minority ethnic communities, and people with disabilities. One interviewee told us that:

"We have a girl from a local high school who runs peer sessions. The kids know her and love it; they come here just because she is here, and the numbers are huge. I doubt we'd have that otherwise. Having local expertise and role models is crucial in these communities."

99. Another interviewee told us of the power of having role models within the same community can have:

"I think one of the most powerful things I've seen since is one of our programs is where you had a pool full of black or Asian swimmers and they're in one session. There was a black lifeguard as well. And it was just wow, it really hit home how little of that we have seen, and how important it truly is to support participation."

Our view

100. As outlined in this chapter, the number of barriers affecting participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas are numerous. Some of the stories shared with us through our citizen-led engagement illustrate just how challenging and formidable these obstacles are. Data collected by Savanta Comres in August 2021 also tells us that people from lower socioeconomic groups are less confident than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in using sports facilities. The same data also told us that those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to consider it important to exercise and less likely to find exercise enjoyable and satisfying.⁶¹ Considering the issues we have identified in this chapter alongside the survey data, we are not surprised that people in disadvantaged areas feel less confident in accessing sport and physical activity.

101. Confidence issues can arise from "shocking" facilities; lack of sporting offers beyond the "traditional sports"; travelling "more than a mile" to participate in an activity; or the "fear of judgement" because of the way someone may look, to name but a few. We think that addressing the barriers highlighted in this report, on a collective basis, will lead to an increase in

⁶¹ www.sport.wales/research-and-insight/comres-research/

confidence in sports participation in disadvantaged areas. However, our work on this has only scratched the surface and it merits further investigation, sooner rather than later.

102. The Welsh Government's remit letter to Sport Wales includes a requirement to identify and deliver opportunities that enable those from disadvantaged groups to benefit from sport and physical activity. We think that this work must be undertaken as a matter of priority and we recommend that the Welsh Government provide additional project funding to Sport Wales to enable it to happen now. The sooner we can identify these issues, the sooner we can create a pipeline of interventions to address them. We think this will boost confidence in disadvantaged areas and lead to that increase in sport and physical activity we all wish to see.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that the Welsh Government urgently provide additional project funding to Sport Wales to enable it to undertake work to identify and deliver opportunities that enable those from disadvantaged groups to benefit from sport and physical activity.

103. Following the notion of marginal gains theory, we think that collectively our other recommendations in this report could make a real difference in reducing the impact of these barriers. For example, by setting a national aim for sports participation in disadvantaged areas, accompanied with a significant funding boost, could make a difference on issues arising under cost of living and across the protected characteristics. We haven't made specific recommendations on individual barriers discussed this chapter for the reason discussed above; we feel it requires more work. However, the one barrier we do feel that we can consider further is that of being able access to facilities.

104. Access to high quality facilities is essential to participating in sport and physical activity. This may be an appropriate multi use games area in a local community or a floodlight all weather pitch. The one institution, that is situated in the heart of every community in Wales, is the local school. We think schools could be the key to opening access and providing suitable spaces for disadvantaged communities to participate in sport and physical activity. This is in addition to the numerous other community halls, sports grounds and private leisure facilities that exist.

105. Throughout the inquiry, we were told how important opening up school facilities were. The Deputy Minister told us that "school facilities should be available to the community", and we agree wholeheartedly. Due to the investment that's taken place through the 21st Century Schools and Sustainable Communities for Learning programmes, there are now much better facilities than there have been for a number of years.

106. We are also aware of the Welsh Government's recent £25million investment into community focused schools in Wales.⁶² Community focused schools are institutions which provide a range of activities, often beyond school hours, to meet the needs of pupils and their local community. This can include additional study support, opening up ICT facilities or providing community sports programmes. The funding announced by the Welsh Government is intended to ensure that more schools in Wales are able to operate as community focused schools. It states that:

*"£20m will be invested in delivering Community Focused Schools, to fund practical ways of improving school facilities in order to enable greater community use. This includes providing equipment storage for community groups running extra-curricular activities, improving external lighting in sports areas, and introducing security measures to segregate school and community use areas."*⁶³

107. Opening local schools for the benefit of communities is a clearly an obvious solution to addressing the barrier of adequate facilities. It ensures that challenges around poor grassroots facilities elsewhere can be mitigated to some extent. Schools are usually located on the doorsteps of all of our communities which reduces travel time; however it should be noted that this is not always the case with Welsh-medium schools. It's also an incredibly efficient use of resources and maximises the use of what are often high quality and new facilities. We appreciate that concerns around safety and costs may exist regarding opening up schools, but the cost of mitigating these should be minor in comparison to building brand new facilities.

108. It is clear to us that there are a number of individual initiatives underway which could all be important in their own way: the Welsh Government pilot; the funding to further develop community focused schools; and the Sport Wales pilot. However, in line with our first recommendation, this does not feel like it joined up. It may well be the case that all these individual pieces of work are linked, but that is not clear to us at present.

109. While we understand that pilots are ongoing and we wouldn't want to prejudice their outcomes, we do think we should make a recommendation now based on the evidence we have considered. As such, we are calling on the Welsh Government to take all steps it can to ensure that all schools with the appropriate facilities are opened up beyond the school day. This should be for all communities in Wales, but we do think the priority in the first instance should be on providing equity of access to disadvantaged areas given the scale of the barriers that

⁶² <https://gov.wales/25m-investment-community-focused-schools-tackle-impact-poverty>.

⁶³ <https://gov.wales/25m-investment-community-focused-schools-tackle-impact-poverty>.

currently exist. That is, we think by prioritising such areas, we are likely to see the quickest and most significant change.

110. We are of the view that following the completion of the different pilots, the Welsh Government should review the findings and lessons learned. This includes understanding how the additional investment for community focused schools has been used and the benefits that occurred. Once this work is completed, the Welsh Government should undertake a community and school facility audit to identify what exists. The audit should not only consider facility availability but also the quality of what's available given what witnesses told us about the poor state of some facilities. The accessibility of these facilities should be factored into this audit i.e. can they be accessed on foot or by public travel methods or do they require private car travel to access them. This is important in the context of Welsh-medium schools where sometimes larger travel distances are required to access them. The audit should also include identifying any opportunities available to collaborate with partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

111. Once this audit is completed, the Welsh Government should identify the areas that require the most support and make available the necessary funding to ensure that there is an increase in sport and physical opportunities in these areas. This approach would allow the Welsh Government to target its resources where they will have the biggest effect.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund the opening up of school facilities in disadvantaged areas to increase opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in those areas. This should be done as follows:

- i. The Welsh Government should review the findings of the different pilots that are taking place with regards to opening schools for wider community use and report and publish a response to this work by no later than July 2023.
- ii. Work with local authorities to undertake a Wales-wide audit of school sport, leisure and physical activity facilities to identify what exists what is the state of these facilities. This should include considering how accessible these facilities are in terms of travel method, including pay special attention to the location of Welsh-medium schools in relation to the community they serve.
- iii. Following completion of this audit, the Welsh Government should identify the areas that require the most urgent support to ensure equity of access to sport and physical activity opportunities and provide the appropriate funding levels to make it happen.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund the opening up of community facilities in disadvantaged areas to increase opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in those areas. This should be done as follows:

- i. Work with local authorities, schools, leisure facility providers and sports clubs to undertake a Wales-wide audit of these facilities to identify what exists, and what is the state of these facilities. This should include considering how accessible these facilities are in terms of safety of access routes, and travel method.
- ii. Following completion of this audit, the Welsh Government should identify the areas that require the most urgent support to ensure equity of access to sport and physical activity opportunities and provide the appropriate funding levels to make it happen.

4. Funding

112. The Welsh Government provides the vast majority of its funding for sport and physical activity through its main sponsored body, Sport Wales. However, it also provides funding for other programmes through different government departments and public bodies.

Welsh Government funding

113. The Welsh Government's 2022-23 Draft Budget narrative document says:

*"The pandemic has impacted on our physical health, and has created a mental health crisis. In addition to the direct NHS investment, we will invest an additional £100m targeted at mental health, including funding in addition to Welsh NHS funding outlined above and more than £10m for children and young people recognising the risks of the lasting and long-term impacts felt by our young people in Wales."*⁶⁴

114. In our [follow up](#) on this issue with the Minister for Economy, Vaughan Gething MS, and the Deputy Minister, we asked for details of sports funding across the Welsh Government departments. In their reply, they told us that:

*"Collaborative working across departments and budgets has been, and will continue to be, key to creating long-term and sustainable shifts in participation. Some great examples of cross-department working include the Healthy and Active Fund which supports a range of innovative projects aimed at increasing participation. As well as our own Department over the last 3 years the Health Department have also provided funding to Sport Wales as follows: 2019/20 £1.465m; 2020/21 £1.640m; 2021/22 £1.606m."*⁶⁵

115. During our evidence session with the Deputy Minister she told us that "that we have the highest level of capital investment in sporting facilities ever—£24 million".⁶⁶

116. In its written evidence to this inquiry, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) told us that "a small change to a large health budget would make a big different to a small sport budget, and have massive public health benefits".⁶⁷

⁶⁴ [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2022-23](#)

⁶⁵ [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2022-23 response from Ministers](#)

⁶⁶ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 23 June 2022, paragraph 180

⁶⁷ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

Sport Wales funding

117. Sport Wales is the national organisation responsible for developing and promoting sport and physical activity in Wales. It is the main adviser to the Welsh Government on sport and supports the delivery of its strategic priorities. It receives the majority of the Welsh Government's funding for sport and physical activity. It also distributes National Lottery grants to elite and grassroots sports. As outlined already, Sport Wales uses the funding provided to it by the Welsh Government in accordance with its remit letter.

118. We considered Sport Wales's funding during our recent scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2022-23. In comparison with the 2021-2022 final budget, revenue funding for Sport Wales increases from £22.4 million to £22.7 million in the 2022-23 Final Budget (an increase of 1 per cent in cash terms). This funding is projected to increase to £24.1 million by 2024-25.⁶⁸

119. In comparison with the 2021-2022 Final Budget, capital funding for Sport Wales decreases from £8.6 million to £8 million in the 2022-23 Final Budget (a decrease of 7 per cent in cash terms).⁶⁹ This funding is projected to remain at £8 million until 2024-25.⁷⁰

120. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government provided an additional £66.5million to support the sports and leisure industry in response to restrictions. In its written evidence to this inquiry, the Welsh Government told us that:

*"There is no doubt that without this financial support, the sector would have suffered irreparable damage that would have had a long-lasting impact on the health and well-being of the nation."*⁷¹

Sport Wales investment model

121. In September 2021, a Welsh Government official told us that:

"Sport Wales, over the last two years, have been engaging very robustly, openly and transparently with all the different governing bodies around Wales in terms of looking at a new funding formula moving forward, where they look at different metrics for how they fund those sports, so those sports can increase participation; more diversity et cetera

⁶⁸ [Senedd scrutiny of Welsh Government Draft Budget 2022-23](#)

⁶⁹ This analysis was disputed by the Minister and Deputy Minister in correspondence with the Committee. They drew a distinction between the "core capital funding for this year [2021-22] (£6.629m)" and the capital funding actually allocated to Sport Wales for this year in the Final Budget (£8.6 million).

⁷⁰ [Welsh Government written evidence Draft Budget 2022-23](#)

⁷¹ [CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, Welsh Government written evidence](#)

*would attract more funding with the aim of creating more diverse people in sport, basically."*⁷²

122. In its written evidence to this inquiry, Sport Wales said that:

*"We are categorically unapologetic about the way we invest in Welsh sport, and are keen to learn, reflect and adapt when necessary. Our new investment approach places inequality at the centre of how we use public funds."*⁷³

123. A number of witnesses, including the FAW, WRU and Cricket Wales, raised concerns regarding the Sport Wales investment model. Brian Davies, told us that:

*"the change in the investment approach we're trying to make here, which is we prioritise those areas of greatest need, and that hasn't always been the case before. There has been a mantra many, many, many years ago about 'sport for sport's sake'. This is the shift we're trying to take here, to show the power of sport, the ability of sport, to make a difference to their communities."*⁷⁴

124. Noel Mooney from the FAW told us that they need extra resources to improve the game at a grassroots level. He said that they are approximately £150m short of where they would like to be. He added that he was shocked at how bad grassroots facilities were in Wales. These concerns were shared with us, at the same time, where their Sport Wales grant will reduce by 27 per cent due a change in the investment model.⁷⁵ The concerns in funding were echoed by Geraint John, Head of Participation at the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) who told us their funding would be reduced by over 30 per cent.⁷⁶

125. Leshia Hawkins, Chief Executive of Cricket Wales, told us that they were facing a "more significant cut". She raised concerns about unintended consequence of what Cricket Wales called a "rigid" new investment model, which it thinks will probably over-fund sports which are "generally not accessed by (or are accessible to) disadvantaged communities". She added that she was not "convinced that the current model recognises how difficult and how much time and investment it takes to really change lives, and these programs do change lives."⁷⁷

⁷² CCWLSIR meeting 15 September 2021, paragraph 189

⁷³ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

⁷⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 16 March 2022, paragraph 97

⁷⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 58

⁷⁶ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 91

⁷⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 104

126. Professor Melitta McNarry and Matthew Williams, Head of Policy at the Welsh Sports Association, told us that Sport Wales do a good job within the parameters of the funding which they receive. Urdd Gobaith Cymru and the Youth Sports Trust both highlighted the positive approach that a longer term funding planning model and strategy could have.

Evidence considered

127. A number of stakeholders had different views on the funding provided for sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas in Wales. These are outlined below.

Views of national organisations and charities

128. Owen Hathway of Sport Wales told us that:

*"we have community funding streams as well; it's probably our most effective immediate policy tool... trying to ensure the funding goes to areas of high deprivation and need more heavily within our crowdfunder funding stream."*⁷⁸

129. In its written evidence to us, Sport Wales noted that this crowdfunder pilot has "amplified that funding at a rate of 2.7, meaning community clubs are receiving £2.70 for every £1 of public investment".⁷⁹

130. A lack of funding was noted by FAW's Noel Mooney who said that:

*"we're about £150 million short of anywhere near the facilities we need to have to have a game that functions normally, compared to our neighbours next-door."*⁸⁰

131. Gary Lewis from Urdd Gobaith Cymru told us that a more sustainable funding approach is key for sport and physical activity. He told us that partnership and collaboration between organisations is key to this.⁸¹

132. This point was further emphasised by Emily Reynolds of the Youth Sports Trust, who noted that collaboration becomes easier when you know what you are working towards, "The money should back that up [the aim or strategy], but, without that as the guiding principle, money will just keep coming in and going is my view."⁸²

⁷⁸ CCWLSIR meeting 16 March, paragraph 99

⁷⁹ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

⁸⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 91

⁸¹ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 110

⁸² CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 144

133. Urdd Gobaith Cymru questioned the sustainability of funding programmes. They used the example of the “Winter of Wellbeing” programme which allowed them to undertake work in some areas for the first time. Gary Lewis told us that:

“how do we act on that after that funding comes to an end. I think we need to have some sort of long-term plan with the Government, with Sport Wales, who are great with us—they’re very supportive—but we really need that partnership and a collaboration between the organisations.”⁸³

134. Victoria Ward, Chief Executive of the Welsh Sports Association, told us that “Summer of Fun” and “Winter of Wellbeing” were “wonderful programmes, but is there any longevity in that?”⁸⁴

135. The issue of long-term and sustainable funding was noted by different sports governing bodies as well. Leshia Hawkins of Cricket Wales told us that long-term sustainable investment would be at the top of their shopping list, whilst Noel Mooney of the FAW told us that:

“It’s easy for us to go in and get up the bunting and take photographs with the local politician who’s opening some short-term programme. That’s not what we’re about; we do long-term programmes that give really clear social return investment for taxpayers’ money.”⁸⁵

Views of those with lived experiences

136. In April 2022, we undertook a series of interviews with people with lived experience of sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas of south Wales.⁸⁶ Participants spoke of the need for more targeted funding to support disadvantaged communities, with several interviewees noting that funding often felt like a postcode lottery:

“Lots of money is directed to BAME communities, but Ely for example is not classified as a BAME community but those kids are still there. It’s a postcode lottery even in disadvantaged areas. Cardiff is so multicultural “that funding should just be pan-city. There are poverty issues across the city.”

137. Some participants told us of the difficulties faced when applying for funding:

⁸³ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 110

⁸⁴ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 229

⁸⁵ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 60

⁸⁶ Engagement findings Participation in sports in disadvantaged areas

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

"The long term benefits of shorter-term funding aren't seen. The funding bid we made had so many hours put into it and several people told us it was a no brainer, local community organisations supported our bid but just didn't tick a certain box and ended up rejected. Why can't potential funders come out and see the impact."

138. Participants suggested that funding be directly given to communities rather than a 'middle men':

"Members of the community want more money to come directly to them and cut out organisational management fees. Stop always giving money to the same organisations, it needs to come directly to communities."

139. Participants also told us of concerns over management fees and having managers 'parachuted in' to run sports projects who weren't familiar with the community:

"Stop giving money to certain organisations all the time. I had a phone call pre-Christmas from an organisation that had funding to deliver here. They had no local knowledge and that's a big problem."

International examples

140. On occasions during the inquiry, witnesses drew our attention to good practice in other parts of the world in terms of dealing with sport in disadvantaged areas.

141. Matthew Williams from the Welsh Sports Association discussed the examples of Norway and New Zealand, which are often seen as world-leading in the world of sports participation:

"It's really important to emphasise that they spend between five and 10 times the amount that we do on sport. Wales does very, very, very well on participation and on elite performance off a relatively small slice of investment. And our comparator nations often outspend us significantly to achieve similar results".⁸⁷

142. Officials from Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa told us of the Active Me – Kia Tū pilot they were running, in partnership with a New Zealand children's charity (Variety NZ), providing financial assistance to reduce barriers to being active to up to 3,000 children and young people in Auckland and Northland. This is a two year pilot which will offer each child and young person up to \$300 a year, for two years, to help pay for new equipment, registration fees, uniforms or

⁸⁷ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 250

other costs to support them to be active in ways they want to be. This funding is provided directly to the individual to help support their access to activity of their choosing.

143. The Welsh Government informed us during our inquiry that in Wales funding is available for access to all sorts of equipment, not just school uniform, but also sports equipment (the Pupil Development Grant). The Deputy Minister told us that “anything that a child needs, particularly in that transition from primary to secondary school, where the purchase of equipment is usually part of the uniform process—gym kit and all the rest of it”.⁸⁸

Our view

144. It is clear from the evidence we have received that there is diversity of opinion on how best to spend money to increase participation in sport in disadvantaged areas. However, one thing that is clear to us is that there is significant benefit in placing funding on a more sustainable, long-term footing.

145. Several stakeholders noted that short term projects were valuable for the length of time they were in operation, but once they were finished, that was it. Others noted the value that longer term investment would provide in longevity and social return. We agree wholeheartedly with these comments. However, we understand why this may not have happened in the past given how funding of devolved government operates. HM Treasury’s recent move to providing the Welsh Government with three year budget cycles changes this.

146. We are of the view that the Welsh Government should now utilise this three year funding cycle for the benefit of sports participation in disadvantaged areas. For the first time last year, the Welsh Government provided three year indicative budgets. Therefore we see no reason as to why this cannot be funnelled down the system for those who undertake the delivery of sport and physical activity on the ground. This move would be consistent with our first recommendation for a new national approach, which would enable better collaboration between partners. We think that better collaboration, with a sustainable funding system could significantly increase participation in disadvantaged areas.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that programmes for funding sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas are placed on longer term funding cycles.

⁸⁸ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 196

147. In addition to placing funding on a more sustainable footing, we are of the view that if the Welsh Government is to meet its existing ambitions, it needs to provide much more funding for sport and physical activity.

148. We discussed numerous times during this inquiry the Welsh Government's notion that sport and physical activity being Wales's most effective preventative health tool. The Welsh Government notes an aspiration in its remit letter to Sport Wales which states that "there is an opportunity for us to seek the positive learning from Covid-19 and to build on the increased awareness of the importance of sport to people's physical and mental health and well-being".

149. However, with no material increase in post-pandemic funding of sport and physical activity, we have to question how such an ambition will be realised? This renewed focus on the importance of physical activity following the outbreak of Covid-19 is incredibly important and is one we support. There has been plenty of rhetoric as well about ensuring that the participation gap in disadvantaged areas doesn't widen following the pandemic. We think the focus shouldn't be on this, it should be on shrinking the gap, and shrinking it fast. This would in turn provide more equity for those from disadvantaged areas wishing to access sport. These two issues combined, in our view, warrant a significant funding boost to ensure that the Welsh Government's vision for sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas is realised.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that the Welsh Government significantly increase the funding available for addressing participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas.

150. A number of governing bodies raised concerns during the course of our inquiry of the impact that changes to the Sport Wales investment model will have on their grant funding. Some of the changes in funding that were highlighted were quite significant. We believe that these governing bodies have a right to be concerned.

151. Despite this, we do accept the argument made by Sport Wales that something needs to be done to attempt to diversify the range of sports that receive funding. This includes undertaking work to diversify the groups that engage with different sports. StreetGames in particular highlighted the need to diversity sports and physical activity offers, especially in disadvantaged areas.

152. We do not underestimate how difficult a challenge this is for Sport Wales, national sporting governing bodies and other sports and physical activity providers. The new investment model is a significant shift from previous funding approaches. As painful as it may be for some of our national sport governing bodies, we do believe it is too early to make any judgements on

the success of Sport Wales's new approach to investment and the equity it could provide for participation in disadvantaged areas compared with other parts of Wales. Therefore we recommend that an independent review is undertaken after three years to assess the impact of the new investment model on participation in disadvantaged areas.

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government and Sport Wales commission an independent review of the impact of the new investment approach on participation in disadvantaged areas in three years' time.

153. There are many different methods for funding in sport in disadvantaged areas. We were particularly interested in the approach taken by Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa with their "Active Me – Kia Tū" pilot. Whilst there is a similar grant available in Wales (the Pupil Development Grant) it is not solely available for costs related to physical activity. It is targeted primarily to assist low income families to access equipment and items needed for school and educational activity. It can be used for sports kit, but it is also used for school uniform, uniform for enrichment activities, stationery and so forth.

154. Whilst we welcome the Deputy Minister's comments that the Pupil Development Grant may be used to purchase additional equipment to participate in school sports for instance, we think there is an opportunity to go further. We think the Welsh Government should fund a pilot scheme called the Physical Activity Development Grant, and use the learning from the New Zealand pilot to inform its design. Eligibility for this grant would be similar to that of the Pupil Development Grant, but it would be targeted specifically for sport and physical activity purposes. It would allow those from disadvantaged areas to receive additional support to participate in activity outside of the school setting, increasing their ability to undertake more physical activity. This grant should be used in as flexible a way as possible, recognising the numerous barriers that exist in accessing sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. In practice this would mean helping individuals to access sport and physical activity in a way that suits them. This could include allowing the grant to fund:

- support for accessing professional advice in developing physical activity or fitness plans which can suit their own needs and/or circumstances;
- sports kit or subscriptions fees to participate in a sports club or activity;
- access to a sports facility or a multi-use games area;
- travel costs.

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

155. We strongly believe that such a grant could prove to be as successful as the Pupil Development Grant. It would also greatly enhance individuals in disadvantaged areas to increase their weekly activity time far beyond what they undertake during physical education lessons in an educational setting.

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Government set up a pilot scheme for a Physical Activity Development Grant, using lessons learnt from the “Active Me – Kia Tū” pilot in New Zealand, in order to improve access for those in disadvantaged areas to access sport and physical activity opportunities.

5. Data

156. There are a number of data sources which are used to inform participation levels in sport and physical activity in Wales. These include:

- the Welsh Government’s annual National Survey of Wales⁸⁹;
- Sport Wales’ National School Sports Survey⁹⁰; and
- other more ad-hoc methods of data collection (such as surveys conducted during the pandemic to assess its impact on participation).

Data on participation in disadvantaged areas

157. The number of families in Wales who are at risk of being in relative poverty income has been around the 23-24 per cent mark for over a decade and a half.⁹¹ Further to this, we also know that physical activity among lower income households tends be lower compared against higher income households.

Table 1 Percentage of children who are active every day according to family affluence⁹²

Year	Low affluence (%)	Medium affluence (%)	High affluence (%)
2013/14	15	13	17
2017/18	15	16	21
2019/20	13	15	20

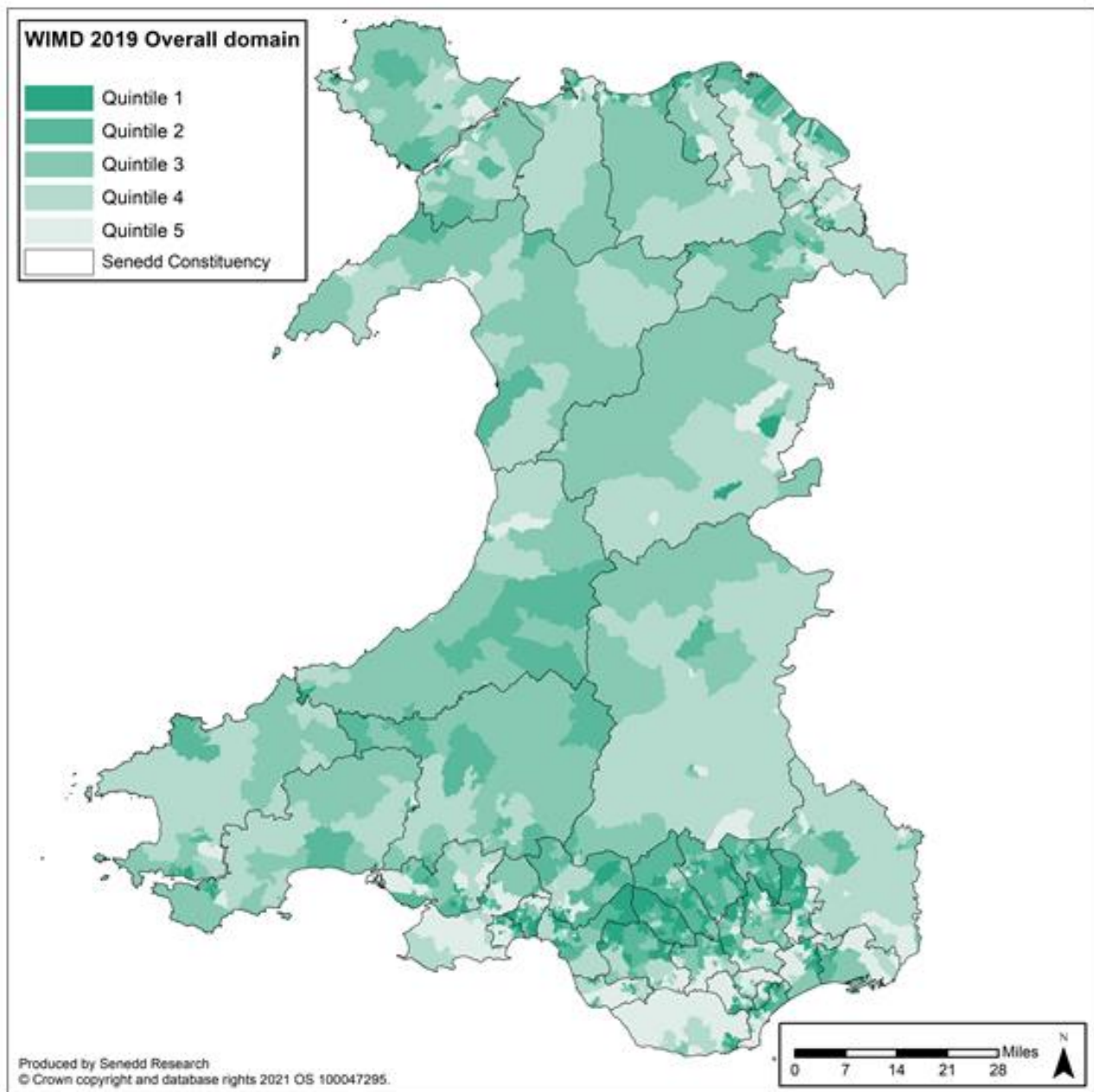
⁸⁹ <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales>

⁹⁰ www.sport.wales/research-and-insight/school-sport-survey/

⁹¹ People in relative income poverty by family type, Stats Wales

⁹² Percentage of children who are active everyday - Health and well-being measures for children for the National Indicators, Stats Wales

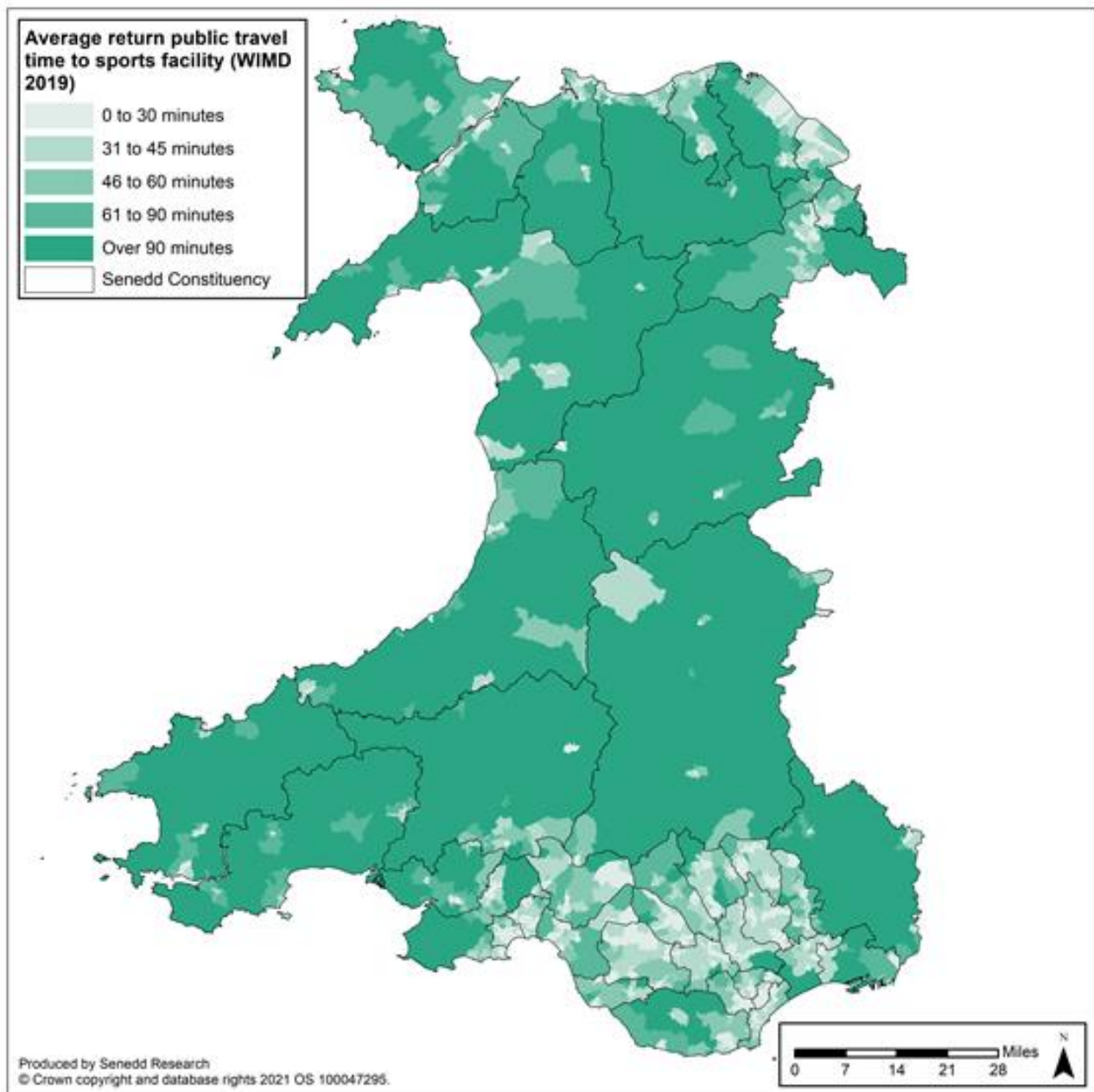
Relative deprivation in Wales 2019⁹³



158. As outlined in the map above, the geographic distribution of those areas with greater relative deprivation is concentrated in what was previously referred to as “west Wales and the Valleys”. However there are pockets of disadvantaged areas right across the country.

⁹³ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019. Darker colours reflect greater relative deprivation.

Access to sporting facilities by public transport⁹⁴



159. The second map shows that aside from areas around Cardiff and the Valleys, the majority of Wales is subject to longer travel times when accessing sport and physical activity opportunities.

National Survey of Wales

160. The National Survey for Wales involves around 12,000 people each year and covers a wide range of topics.⁹⁵ This includes questions on sport and physical activity. The results are used by

⁹⁴ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019. NB. Darker colours represent longer travel times.

⁹⁵ <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales>

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

the Welsh Government to “help make Wales a better place to live”. It also has many delivery partners, mainly the government’s sponsored bodies, including Sport Wales.

161. Sport Wales told us that the questions they input focus upon sporting activity participations across the nation. This information “help(s) gain an informed overview of the adult populations level of sporting activity.”⁹⁶

162. The statistical snapshot available to us was the pre-pandemic iteration including data from 2019-20.⁹⁷ This most recent data is outlined in the first chapter of this report.

School Sport Survey

163. Sport Wales notes that their School Sport Survey is one of the biggest surveys of young people in world, and that:

“The School Sport Survey gives us and the sector a rich insight into participation levels, behaviours and attitudes. It started in 2011 when 110,000 children and young people took part. We have been taking the survey to 1000 schools across Wales on a regular basis ever since.”⁹⁸

164. The survey was carried out in 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2018. The most recent findings in 2018 were based on responses from 120,000 schoolchildren. This data is then weighted to try to make it representative of the population.

165. The results show that an increase in participation seen from 2011 to 2015 in has been sustained, with 48 per cent of young people taking part in sport three or more times a week in addition to timetabled PE lessons.

166. The 2018 figures⁹⁹ suggest a narrowing in the participation gap for some under-represented groups:

- 45 per cent of children with a disability or impairment are now taking part in sport three or more times a week (in addition to timetabled PE lessons), up from 40 per cent in 2015.
- The lowest participating ethnic minority group, Asian British, has increased regular participants from 36 to 40 per cent bringing them closer to the national average.

⁹⁶ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

⁹⁷ www.sport.wales/files/68cfd5f42d91edc2241a73c2258eee0.pdf

⁹⁸ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

⁹⁹ www.sport.wales/content-vault/school-sports-survey-2018/

- Meanwhile there looks to be a more stubborn gap between the most and least deprived. 42 per cent of pupils attending schools with the highest number of pupils eligible for free school meals take part three or more times a week (in addition to timetabled PE lessons), down from 43 per cent in 2015. This figure compares with 55 per cent of pupils at schools with the smallest number of pupils eligible for free school meals.

167. Levels of people with disabilities, those from ethnic minority communities and lower levels of affluence are all typically more prevalent in areas of greater deprivation.

168. In its written evidence, Sport Wales stated that the School Survey can help identify a wide range of barriers which limit participation of children and young people in sport. They went on to say that “the three most prominent responses which would encourage pupils to do more sport in the 2018 survey were: ‘If I had more time...’ ‘If clubs were easier to get to...’ ‘If it were cheaper...’.

169. Unfortunately, the results of the 2022 School Sport Survey were not available to us as the it was being conducted during the course of our inquiry.

Other data sources

170. During the pandemic Sport Wales commissioned Savanta ComRes – a polling organisation – to poll adults¹⁰⁰ on their participation in sport at various levels of restrictions. Key findings from the most recent survey (August 2021, the fourth survey) include:

- Overall activity levels have increased since March 2021 and the majority of adults now report doing more activity than before the pandemic. However, older adults, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those with a long-standing condition or illness are still more likely to report doing less activity than they were before the pandemic.
- Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were twice as likely as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to have done no exercise in the past week (ABC1 – 11 per cent : C2DE – 22 per cent).
- In contrast, children from lower income families were more likely to do the recommended level of exercise for children per day (an hour or more) per weekday

¹⁰⁰ www.sport.wales/research-and-insight/comres-research/

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

(ABC1 – 17 per cent : C2DE – 23 per cent), though the reverse is true for weekend days.

- In every surveyed sport, there was a reduction in regular participation of those from a lower socioeconomic when compared with pre-pandemic. The same is not true for those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, although there was still a general trend of reduced participation.
- Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more confident than adults from a lower socioeconomic background in using every surveyed sports facility.
- Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to consider it important to exercise regularly (ABC1 – 71 per cent : C2DE – 61 per cent).
- Adults from a higher socioeconomic background were more likely to find exercise enjoyable and satisfying (ABC1 – 67 per cent : C2DE – 53 per cent).

Evidence considered

171. During the course of our inquiry, the issue of data was discussed on numerous occasions.

School survey data

172. On its School Sports Survey, Sport Wales told us that it uses the survey to “make more informed decisions about future investment resources” and “allows us to examine under-represented groups and we use the evidence to tackle some of the barriers that prevent children and young people taking part”.

173. A number of governing bodies noted that the data they can access is used to inform planning and priorities within their respective sports. Fergus Feeney, Chief Executive of Swim Wales, told us that:

“our data and insight tell us that 52 per cent of Welsh schoolchildren will leave key stage 2 without the ability to be able to swim, which is really shocking.”¹⁰¹

174. The Welsh Sports Association told us that while the school survey data worked well at national and regional level, but that small sample sizes at local levels, especially for smaller sports, begin to limit its usefulness. They also noted that the 20 main governing bodies received individual insight reports for their sports. However smaller sports, who may benefit from such

¹⁰¹ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 162

information to help them grow, do not have access to this information. Matthew Williams told us that:

*"if you start thinking about things like disability sport, where there are relatively few numbers of people in local areas with specific disabilities or doing specific disability sport. You won't pick that up in the way that the school sport survey is conducted."*¹⁰²

175. In oral evidence, StreetGames called for data to be available "in an open way so that organisations like ourselves can really use it".¹⁰³ Professor McNarry made a similar point, saying that the existing data is "perhaps not as user-friendly as it is in other parts of the UK, and that's something we could certainly work on".¹⁰⁴

176. The WLGA also called for qualitative data.¹⁰⁵ Professor McNarry seemed to support this call, saying that quantitative data:

*"...allows us to identify where further insight is needed and then I do think we need to go and address that by getting the lived experiences of people, and that's something that is increasingly called for across the area."*¹⁰⁶

177. Despite these comments, stakeholders were generally positive of the impact of the School Sport Survey.

Views on adult participation data

178. While there is a relative wealth of information when it comes to children and young people in disadvantaged areas, the opposite is true of data on adult participation.

179. Matthew Williams from Wales Sports Association told us that "the other place where we are missing a big chunk of data that we just don't have is adult participation." He added that the method used for the National Survey of Wales provided a "crude measure" of adult participation in physical activity. This is different from England where they undertake an "active lives survey".¹⁰⁷ He added that also given the sample size "we don't get information on specific sports in specific areas from that data".¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 4 May 2022, paragraph 226

¹⁰³ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 8 June 2022, paragraph 59

¹⁰⁴ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 8 June 2022, paragraph 228

¹⁰⁵ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

¹⁰⁶ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 8 June 2022, paragraph 227

¹⁰⁷ [Sport England Active Lives Survey](#)

¹⁰⁸ [CCWLSIR meeting](#) 4 May 2022, paragraph 227

Levelling the playing field

Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas

180. Individual sport national governing bodies collect their own data. Geraint John of the WRU told us that:

*"you look at the participation number, the health and well-being there, the deprivation, child poverty. We try and pull all of that together to look at where we need to go in the future."*¹⁰⁹

181. We asked the Welsh Government if they'd consider further methods to capture data related to adults. A Welsh Government official told us that:

*"Yes, I think that would be something we'd need to discuss further with Sport Wales. Obviously, the new investment model they have, and that's still early days, that's very much about quantitative and quantitative input to support and feed into decision making. So, that's very much a data-driven element. So, whether there are any gaps or things there that are needed to build on that, we'd absolutely welcome discussion and explore that further."*¹¹⁰

Collaboration on data

182. A number of stakeholders showed that a range of different data sources exist to inform participation in sport in disadvantaged areas. This includes data they hold themselves, as well as accessing other public sources, such as the school sport survey or data held by national and local government.

183. In addition to the data already outlined in this chapter, other organisations collect and hold their own data. For instance, CollegesWales told us how colleges were beginning to capture data against a range of sources. In their written submission, they noted that ensuring learners take physically active and well-being opportunities helps with enhancing educational outcomes and promotes healthier college communities.¹¹¹

184. Leshia Hawkins of Cricket Wales told us "I do think there's some richer data that we could all get better at collaborating on".¹¹² Mark Lawrie from StreetGames told us of the benefit of bringing together different sources, and the impact it could have on disadvantaged areas:

"I'd say is there are so many other data sources about disadvantaged communities, from health, from education, from all of the other areas of

¹⁰⁹ CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 90

¹¹⁰ CCWLSIR meeting 23 June 2022, paragraph 279

¹¹¹ [Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence](#)

¹¹² CCWLSIR meeting 4 May 2022, paragraph 96

Government, and from our point of view, drawing those together, along with local intelligence from local people—because that's another source that we maybe don't tap into as much as we should—you can then put sports data alongside all the other data sets and really find ways to develop the right interventions."¹¹³

185. This was illustrated on a practical level by CollegesWales who told us that:

*"Some data is available but does not provide as much information as it could. For example, the report on sports participation within Welsh Local Authorities shows the percentage of adults participating in sporting activity –however this data is not broken down in terms of areas of deprivation."*¹¹⁴

Our view

186. It is clear from the evidence we have considered that the data available on children and young people is far superior to what is available for adults. Sport Wales's longstanding National School Sport Survey is obviously of huge benefit to driving policy in this field. If it were not for the recent surveys undertaken by Savanta Comres, on behalf of Sport Wales, with regards to adult sports participation during the pandemic, the data gap for adults would be much bigger (the last national survey was conducted in 2019/20).

187. On the data available for children and young people, Sport Wales must be applauded for their success in this area. The consistency in information collected and provided to key partners, over a number of years, has facilitated a data driven approach to policy making. However we do think the accessibility of this data could be improved.

188. We heard evidence that smaller sports do not receive data from the survey, unlike the 20 largest sports. Whilst there may be very good reason for this, for instance sample size, we do think that this data should be shared with other bodies.

189. We also heard that the data should be provided in an open format so that a range of organisations can use it. We agree with this as we believe the more people who are able to analyse and interpret the data, the better insight that will be available. This in turn could lead to better outcomes for sports participation in disadvantaged areas, including helping to address individual barriers discussed in a previous chapter. Therefore, we recommend that Sport Wales

¹¹³ CCWLSIR meeting 8 June 2022, paragraph 60

¹¹⁴ Participation in sport in disadvantaged areas written evidence

should make the next round of data collected through the National School Sports Survey available in an open source format.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that Sport Wales ensures that future National School Sports Survey data is made available in an open source format to provide increased insight in order to ensure better equity of access to sport in disadvantaged areas.

190. We also received evidence that called for better availability of qualitative data. Qualitative data could be targeted build a better understanding of the issues facing individuals in disadvantaged areas trying to access sport and physical activity. For this reason, we recommend that consideration be given as to how qualitative information can be collected.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government and Sport Wales consider how it can gather qualitative data in order to provide better insight into the issues facing sports participation in disadvantaged areas.

191. We believe that the level of data collected for adult sports participation in Wales is poor. This has to change.

192. While the National Survey of Wales does collect data for adults, we were told this is a “crude measure”. The most recent Sport Wales published analysis¹¹⁵ of adult participation in the National Survey (2019-20) does not explore links between participation and deprivation. Without Sport Wales commissioning Savanta ComRes to include questions on this during its pandemic surveys, there would be a data gap spanning a number of years.

193. We have been told numerous times throughout this inquiry how important and vital the school sport survey data is to informing policy decisions. Sport Wales, rightly so, prides itself on using data to inform its work. We believe the missing part of this data jigsaw is collecting regular, robust data on adult participation in sport. The insight that such data could provide on informing decision making in disadvantaged areas could be a game changer.

194. We are of the view that the collection of regular data, with similar questions being asked (to allow for tracking of participation trends for instance), would provide a wealth of information to inform policy making. It would also greatly assist the Welsh Government with setting its ambition and national targets for sports participation in disadvantaged areas (as per our first recommendation). It would also allow us as parliamentarians to hold the government to account on its performance in this area.

¹¹⁵ National Survey for Wales 2019-20: Sport and Active Lifestyles

195. As such, we strongly recommend that the Welsh Government fund, and Sport Wales then pilot, and roll out a full, regular survey of adult sports participation in Wales. We strongly recommend that the Welsh Government fund, and Sport Wales then pilot, and roll out a full, regular survey of adult sports participation.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the Welsh Government fund, and Sport Wales then pilot, and roll out a full, regular survey of adult sports participation.

196. The final issue we considered in relation to data was the collaborative aspect of it. We know that a range of different data sources exist, and the level of accessibility to each source varies greatly. Given the vast sources that do exist, we think work is required to investigate how best this data can be shared and accessed by all. As noted by StreetGames, by drawing this information together, you can begin to “really find ways to develop the right interventions”.

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government consider how it can bring together different sources of data related to sports participation in disadvantaged areas and make it publicly available in one place.

Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
16 March 2022	Brian Davies, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Sport Wales Owen Hathway, Assistant Director, Insight, Policy and Public Affairs, Sport Wales
4 May 2022	Noel Mooney, Chief Executive Officer, Football Association Wales Aled Lewis, Head of Football Development, Football Association Wales Trust Leshia Hawkins, Chief Executive Officer, Cricket Wales Mojeid Ilyas, Diverse Communities Development Officer, Cricket Wales Geraint John, Community Director, Welsh Rugby Union Chris Munro, National Club Development Lead, Welsh Rugby Union
4 May 2022	Fergus Feeney, Chief Executive Officer, Swim Wales Hanna Guise, National Learn to Swim Manager, Swim Wales Phil John, Vice Chair, Basketball Wales Azeb Smalley, Director for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Basketball Wales
4 May 2022	Victoria Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Welsh Sports Association

Date	Name and Organisation
	<p>Matthew Williams, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Welsh Sports Association</p>
<p>8 June 2022</p>	<p>Mark Lawrie, Chief Executive Officer, StreetGames</p> <p>Claire Lane, Wales Director, StreetGames</p> <p>Fiona Reid, Chief Executive, Disability Sport Wales</p> <p>Gary Lewis, Sports and Apprenticeship Director, Urdd Gobaith Cymru</p> <p>Jo Jones, South Wales Regional Manager, Urdd Gobaith Cymru</p> <p>Emily Reynolds, National Programmes Director, Youth Sport Trust</p> <p>Professor Melita McNarry, Swansea University</p>
<p>23 June 2022</p>	<p>Dawn Bowden, Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport and Chief Whip, Welsh Government</p> <p>Steffan Roberts, Deputy Director, Tourism Development and Sport, Welsh Government</p> <p>Neil Welch, Head of Sport, Welsh Government</p>

Annex B: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Reference	Organisation
SDA 01	Response from an individual
SDA 02	Older People's Commissioner for Wales
SDA 03	Football Association of Wales
SDA 04	Sport Wales
SDA 05	Cricket Wales
SDA 06	Sported Foundation
SDA 07	CollegesWales
SDA 08	Welsh Local Government Association
SDA 09	Urdd Gobaith Cymru
SDA 10	StreetGames
SDA 11	Swim Wales

Additional Information

The Committee met the following organisations when they visited north Wales.

Title	Date
Wrexham AFC	19 May 2022
Dreigiau'r Dyffryn	19 May 2022
Plas Menai National Outdoor Centre	20 May 2022