



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

Audit Committee



Increasing Physical Activity in Wales

Committee Report AC(3) 06-08
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THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Report presented to the National Assembly for Wales on 31 July 2008 in
accordance with section 143(1) of the Government of Wales Act 2006

Increasing physical activity in Wales

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Summary

1. Physical activity has many benefits for health, particularly in reducing the risk of a number of serious diseases. Higher rates of physical activity also have a number of other social and economic benefits. The consequences of physical inactivity are increasingly becoming a global problem for this and future generations. In Wales, 22 per cent of children and adolescents are obese or overweight and in a comparison of 34 countries only Malta and USA reported higher figures. The financial costs associated with physical inactivity, although difficult to quantify, are significant, at around £650 million a year for Wales. The international standard for the recommended amount of physical activity for adults is at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, including informal everyday activities, at least five times a week (5x30); and for children and young people under 16 the standard is 60 minutes five times a week (5x60). Levels of activity in Wales are low with nearly half of the adult population of Wales, and a quarter of young people aged 11-16, being totally inactive.
2. The Assembly Government's strategy for sport and physical activity was set out in January 2005 in *Climbing Higher*. The cross-cutting nature of physical activity means that achievement of *Climbing Higher* targets requires many public, private and voluntary sector organisations to work together at local, regional and national levels. Also, increasing overall levels of physical activity in Wales, as elsewhere, presents inherent difficulty, as it requires cultural and behavioural change in large numbers of people.
3. On the basis of a report published by the Auditor General for Wales¹, we took evidence from Huw Brodie and Gwilym Evans from the Assembly Government's Rural Affairs and Heritage Department; Tony Jewell and Elaine McNish from its Department for Public Health and Health Professions; and Huw Jones, Chief Executive of the Sports Council for Wales (the Sports Council). We examined what progress had been made in increasing physical activity in Wales since the launch of the *Climbing Higher* strategy in January 2005, and the extent to which the Assembly Government had acted upon the Auditor General's recommendations over the year since his report was published.

¹ Auditor General for Wales (AGW) report, *Increasing physical activity*, published June 2007

4. We concluded that, despite the recommendations of the Auditor General, three and a half years after the strategy was launched, none of the key building blocks needed to deliver an ambitious policy such as *Climbing Higher* were yet in place:
 - a. leadership to the public sector is lacking;
 - b. delivery mechanisms are unclear; and
 - c. there are no proper arrangements for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes.

The Assembly Government is not providing effective leadership to the public sector

5. The *Climbing Higher* policy is ambitious and requires collaboration across many departments in the Assembly Government, local authorities, the Sports Council, the National Public Health Service, and community, voluntary and charitable organisations. Given this ambition and complexity, strong leadership is most particularly required at the Assembly Government level.
6. As to where within the Assembly Government we should look for such leadership, we remain unclear as to which department is now responsible for the implementation of the policy. On the one hand, Dr Jewell's department is developing a public health strategic framework, *A Healthy Future*, intended to provide a steer as to how government departments and others can work together to improve public health, in which physical activity is a key element. On the other hand, Mr Brodie's department is, we were told, working up an action plan also aimed at setting out a coherent response to increasing physical activity. These two separate pieces of work, the public health strategic framework and the physical activity action plan, are due to be produced at different times (early in 2009, and in spring 2009 respectively); and the relationship between the two was not clear to us from the evidence we heard.
7. Despite the Auditor General's recommendations, there is still no high level steering group within the Assembly Government to oversee the implementation, coordination and achievement of *Climbing Higher*, and no named individual with overall responsibility for physical activity work in Wales. There even appeared to be abdication of responsibility for the Assembly Government's past actions in this sphere: for example, we received no answer to our questions about the reasons for lack of progress with an action plan. It is a long-established practice that a Parliamentary audit committee can expect the accounting officers who

appear before it to be able to give an account of the actions of their predecessors.

8. As regards high level coordination, the thematic sub-group of the public health strategic framework examining physical activity (and other issues) has met only once; and there is a group of officials meeting on an *ad hoc* basis to produce the action plan. Neither of these groups has the seniority envisaged by the Auditor General to be able to provide the strong leadership required to drive forward the *Climbing Higher* strategy.
9. As to the Auditor General's recommendation in June 2007 that giving one individual overall responsibility would be the best way of providing the necessary coordination, we were astonished to be told over 12 months later that the Assembly Government was still undecided and would continue to reflect on the issue. We consider that now is the time for action rather than reflection given that three and a half years has elapsed since the *Climbing Higher* strategy was launched.
10. The Auditor General's report highlights the need for cultural change in order to change people's behaviour and overcome the range of complex issues that create barriers to people becoming more physically active. The Health Challenge Wales campaign is making a start on attempting to get the message across that even taking small steps to increase physical activity can benefit health. But physical activity levels in Wales remain low, and there is an unhelpful lack of clarity around the main *Climbing Higher* 5x30 target. We therefore question whether clear and unambiguous messages about the benefits of physical activity are reaching those that need it most in society.

The Climbing Higher strategy is not underpinned by effective arrangements that clarify roles and responsibilities, align plans and set out clear actions to achieve targets

11. For the *Climbing Higher* strategy to work, all relevant delivery partners need to know what their responsibilities are. Yet roles and responsibilities have not been made clear to any of the partner organisations that are essential to the successful delivery of *Climbing Higher*. Witnesses were clear about how they wanted their partners to contribute but were still working on what they described as a hard slog towards strategic buy-in from local authorities. However we are puzzled that a matter as fundamental as this is only now being addressed.

12. As increasing physical activity is an issue that cuts across many organisations, it is very important that plans and strategies are aligned if the *Climbing Higher* strategy is to stand any chance of success. However, the Auditor General's analysis of strategies across the Assembly Government and partner organisations found a number of deficiencies in the way that these strategies aligned with the aspirations of the strategy. New guidance on Health, Social Care and Well-being strategies places greater emphasis than in the past on physical activity; and the Sports Council is working with local authorities on Partnership Agreements that are attempting to take a broader approach to increasing physical activity. Despite these measures, and some specific examples of effective joint working, we nonetheless conclude that much more needs to be done.
13. Many of the problems we observe are attributable to the absence of an action plan to underpin the strategy. Current plans are for an integrated action plan to be produced in the spring of 2009. By then the strategy will be more than four years into its 20 year span, and the strategy itself commits to four-yearly evaluation. Yet we were told, by way of explanation of its absence, that it would be unwise to rush the production of an action plan. We think that it is not a matter of precipitate haste but straightforward good practice to give thought to implementation at the time of formulating policy, particularly complex, challenging strategies such as *Climbing Higher*, and to devise an action plan as the first step in implementing such strategies.
14. Clarity on roles and responsibilities and the early development of an action plan would have helped to identify and remove barriers to progress. For example, the short-term nature and inflexibility of some of the funding for schemes to increase physical activity may be hindering progress. There needs to be more flexible and innovative approaches to funding that allow for locally developed schemes within a broader framework that aligns with national priorities. Although the Sports Council's Local Authority Partnership Agreements are addressing the issue of more flexible funding, the Assembly Government has not carried out a proper assessment of its funding strategy for supporting physical activity and delivering *Climbing Higher* targets, as recommended by the Auditor General. There is a need to fundamentally challenge current public sector approaches to increasing physical activity which have traditionally been based around leisure

centre provision. A review of funding needs to consider the effectiveness of the funding that is currently tied up in leisure centres across Wales to ensure that provision is appropriate and sustainable; it should also assess the adequacy of funding for the voluntary sector, which could play a large part in improving levels of physical activity.

There are no robust measures in place that can evaluate progress against targets or inform the future policy direction of the Climbing Higher strategy

15. The *Climbing Higher* strategy rightly envisages regular reviews of progress. Regrettably the eleven specific targets set in the strategy document offer very little help towards such evaluation. Some of the targets are currently not capable of being measured, there is some ambiguity over how others will be measured, and for those that can be measured there are concerns about how reliable and robust the data is. In several cases, nobody knows whose job it is to measure progress. These factors, together with the absence of information on current levels of baseline performance in some cases, mean that it is impossible to assess progress.
16. While we are pleased to acknowledge that these problems have now been recognised by the Assembly Government, and that a key element in the work on the action plan will be the development of a research and evaluation framework, this situation suggests very strongly that the strategy was poorly thought out at the outset, not only in respect of implementation, as we commented above, but also in respect of measures of success. A more robust evaluation framework would also address some of the problems identified by the Auditor General and external reviewers with the Assembly Government's pilot free swimming initiative for the under 16s and over 60s. In particular, it should consider whether the £5 million a year scheme is providing value for money.

Recommendations

- (i) The Assembly Government is not providing the effective leadership to the public sector in Wales that is required to achieve a concerted and coordinated effort to increase physical activity. **We recommend that the Assembly Government:**
 - a. Identify which government department is taking the lead on the *Climbing Higher* strategy and increasing physical activity in Wales.

- b. Establish a high level steering group to provide much needed leadership, as recommended by the Auditor General.
 - c. Nominate a senior individual to champion physical activity work across the Assembly Government and to liaise with other stakeholders in overseeing and coordinating all physical activity work in Wales; as recommended by the Auditor General.
 - d. Define roles and responsibilities clearly across the Assembly Government and partner organisations involved in the delivery of the physical activity agenda, as recommended by the Auditor General.
 - e. Consider the possibility of placing some sort of statutory duty on local authorities in relation to provision for physical activity.
- (ii) The importance of physical activity is not being communicated clearly to the people of Wales. **We recommend that the Assembly Government and its delivery partners should instigate a public awareness-raising campaign that clarifies the message that even engaging in small amounts of exercise will be beneficial to health.**
- (iii) There is no action plan in place. **We recommend that the Assembly Government expedites work on the action plan that:**
- a. sets out how departments and sponsored bodies will coordinate and report on activities that contribute to increasing physical activity.
 - b. is consistent with other work being undertaken on the public health strategic framework.
 - c. is consistent with the funding that the Assembly Government intends to provide.
- (iv) Funding for physical activity is not well coordinated and its effectiveness has not been appraised. **We recommend that the Assembly Government and its delivery partners should carry out a fundamental review of funding for physical activity; as recommended by the Auditor General. The review should include:**
- a. An assessment of the funding that currently supports the leisure centre infrastructure in Wales.

- b. Consideration of the optimum level of facility provision required and the level of funding needed to sustain it.
 - c. Funding support for the voluntary sector.
- (v) The Assembly Government's flagship scheme for increasing physical activity, its Free Swimming initiative, contains a number of weaknesses. **We recommend that the Assembly Government implement the recommendations in relation to the Free Swimming initiative made by both the Auditor General and the evaluation report produced by the University of Wales Institute Cardiff.**
- (vi) Given our concerns about ability of the Assembly Government to achieve its aspirations for increasing physical activity, we would like to be kept informed of progress. **We recommend that, in addition to its usual initial response to our report, the Assembly Government provide this Committee with an update report, tracking progress against each of our recommendations, within 12 months of the date of our hearing (ie no later than 5 June 2009).**

The Assembly Government is not providing effective leadership to the public sector in Wales

17. The Welsh Assembly Government published its strategy for sport and physical activity, *Climbing Higher*, in January 2005. The strategy contains 11 targets, many of them long-term, aimed at increasing levels of physical activity in Wales, with the main target being to “match the best global standards for levels of sport and physical activity”.²
18. The cross-cutting nature of physical activity means that many public, private and voluntary sector organisations need to work together at local, regional and national levels. The main organisations involved are the Assembly Government (particularly those parts which deal with sport and health), local authorities, the Sports Council, the National Public Health Service, and community, voluntary and charitable organisations.³ To achieve the necessary degree of coordination requires strong leadership at many levels, primarily at the Assembly Government level, to provide focus and to set priorities that provide a lead for others.

Leadership on physical activity within the Assembly Government is diffuse

19. The lead on developing the *Climbing Higher* strategy within the Assembly Government, and its subsequent implementation, has been taken by the Sports Policy Unit, now part of Mr Brodie’s Department of Rural Affairs and Heritage. This is in contrast to other countries that have a good record on increasing physical activity, such as Finland and Canada, where health departments are taking the lead, in line with World Health Organisation advice.⁴ The risk is that associating physical activity with sport might deter people who have no interest in sport from taking part in physical activity – even though sport is only at the very end of the physical activity spectrum, which also includes manual work, such as gardening, active living, such as walking to the shops, and recreation such as dance or cycling.⁵
20. When we asked witnesses about this, we received mixed messages. On the one hand, Mr Brodie told us that health was the ultimate policy end user, and that work on increasing physical activity was being led from the public health

² AGW report, paragraph 1.12

³ AGW report, paragraphs 1.19 – 1.24; Annex A, paragraph 15

⁴ AGW report, paragraphs 1.25-1.28

⁵ AGW report, paragraph 1.5 and Figure 1

angle.⁶ The importance of health is in line with the emerging public health strategic framework, *A Healthy Future*, that is being developed by Dr Jewell's department, and which includes physical activity as a key element of improving public health. This cross-government commitment was agreed in November 2007 with leadership being provided by Dr Jewell, as Chief Medical Officer, and the Minister for Health and Social Care; it is intended to provide a steer as to how government departments and other stakeholders can work together to improve public health. To support this framework, Dr Jewell's department has established some thematic working groups; the lead group relating to physical activity is 'Healthy Eating, Food and Fitness', although all groups will be considering their contribution to the issue. We were told that it is the Assembly Government's intention to formally consult on the Framework in early 2009 with it becoming effective from 2009-2020.⁷

21. However, despite this activity on the health front, Mr Brodie referred separately to one of his officials, the Director of Culture and Sport, taking a strong personal role in ensuring that matters relating to physical activity come together.⁸ And we were also told of work being undertaken in Mr Brodie's department to produce an action plan on physical activity⁹ (considered in more detail below, at paragraph 40).
22. We are therefore unclear which department within the Assembly Government, sport or health, now has responsibility for giving effect to the aspirations set out in *Climbing Higher*. On the face of it, it appears that there are two groups within the Assembly Government that are both addressing the same issue of a coordinated approach to increasing physical activity, but potentially in an uncoordinated way. For example, the two groups are working to different timescales.
23. We agree with Dr Jewell that the work needed to increasing physical activity needs to be done across government.¹⁰ In one sense it does not matter where overall responsibility lies, as long as the work is done. But our concern is that, without clear lines of responsibility and accountability, and given the slow start

⁶ Annex A, paragraphs 125 and 188

⁷ Annex A, paragraphs 17 – 21

⁸ Annex A, paragraph 91

⁹ Annex A, paragraph 26

¹⁰ Annex A, paragraph 126

made towards delivering *Climbing Higher*, there is a real risk that Assembly Government action on this front continues to be uncoordinated.

24. Very much a related issue is the slow progress that is being made in addressing the key issue of leadership. In response to the Auditor General's recommendation that the Assembly Government "establish a high-level *Climbing Higher* steering group to provide leadership and oversee the implementation, coordination, and achievement of *Climbing Higher*"¹¹, Mr Brodie told us that the Healthy Eating, Food and Fitness group (paragraph 20) had met once. He also referred to the *Climbing Higher* working group, a cross-departmental network of officers that meet on an ad hoc basis who are developing the action plan (paragraph 21).¹² This group, however, clearly does not have the seniority of the sort envisaged by the Auditor General as being needed to drive through the actions required for *Climbing Higher*
25. We discussed with witnesses the Auditor General's recommendation to "appoint a named individual with responsibility for overseeing and coordinating all physical activity work in Wales".¹³ Mr Brodie told us that there were advantages and disadvantages to a senior official leading internally on everything to do with physical activity, and that he was not wholly convinced that giving a single individual the responsibility was necessarily the best way to achieve the desired outcome. Mr Brodie emphasised that he had not yet come to a view and said that he would continue to reflect on the issue.¹⁴ We consider that, three and a half years on from *Climbing Higher*, there has been ample time for reflection and that, bearing in mind the marked lack of progress and inspiration emerging from the Assembly Government, now is the time for action.
26. We recognise that many government departments and partner agencies need to work together to find effective approaches to increase physical activity levels of activity. However, the lack of clear leadership is having a detrimental effect, as it appears that the issue is "everybody's and nobody's" responsibility. We are not at all convinced that the current arrangements described to us by the witnesses go far enough in meeting the Auditor General's recommendations or will be effective enough in leading, inspiring and galvanising the public sector in Wales

¹¹ AGW report, recommendation i (a)

¹² Annex A, paragraphs 85 – 89

¹³ AGW report, recommendation i (b)

¹⁴ Annex A, paragraphs 92 – 106

to ensure that efforts to increase physical activity are given a high enough priority. If real progress is to be made, we believe that coherent Assembly Government leadership needs to be shown at the highest level – perhaps through a Cabinet Group. We also believe that a nominated person with specific responsibility would be able to focus and coordinate activity to better effect than is currently the case.

27. In this context, we should also record our dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of ownership being taken by Assembly Government witnesses in response to some of our questions. On more than one occasion, when we were trying to ascertain the reasons for a lack of progress, witnesses said that it was difficult to comment on past events.¹⁵ This is contrary to the convention that Accounting Officers assume full responsibility for the actions of their predecessors. It also betrays to us the lack of cohesiveness within the Assembly Government to tackling *Climbing Higher*.

The importance of physical activity is not being communicated clearly to the people of Wales

28. An important area where the Assembly Government needs to demonstrate cohesive leadership is in the communication to the people of Wales of the need to increase levels of activity. The Auditor General reported that increasing physical activity from its current low levels in Wales required cultural change to people's behaviour, and that there were a range of complex issues that create barriers to increased activity.¹⁶ In his evidence, Mr Jones gave good expression to the extent of the challenge in individual terms, and contrasted the culture in Wales with that in Scandinavia.¹⁷ Finland and Canada, where physical activity levels have increased over a number of years, have successfully used social marketing – “the systematic application of marketing concepts and techniques” – to overcome behavioural barriers.¹⁸
29. We heard evidence that the Assembly Government is investigating a number of ways to create behavioural change, including motivational interviewing and goal setting. The Assembly Government is also considering the effect environments have and is working with planners and transport planners on these issues. We

¹⁵ Annex A, paragraphs 156 and 213

¹⁶ AGW report, paragraphs 1.15 – 1.16

¹⁷ Annex A, paragraphs 201 and 199

¹⁸ AGW report, paragraphs 1.16 – 1.18, and Box 1

see this work as being fundamental in embedding physical activity into everyday life. We urge the Assembly Government to ensure that opportunities for physical activity become a regular consideration in planning decisions, and that opportunities are not heedlessly lost through, for example, the selling off of playing fields without consideration of impacts on physical activity. Witnesses also told us that the Health Challenge Wales campaign is making a start on social marketing, by attempting to get the message across that even taking small steps to increase physical activity – “doorstep activities”, in Mr Jones’ phrase, rather than, for example, joining a football club – can benefit health, particularly for the most sedentary of the population.¹⁹ In this context, physical activity is one of the four elements of a healthy lifestyle that is relatively simple to communicate, the others relating to smoking, drinking and eating.²⁰

30. We welcome these approaches, but question how clear the messages are to the public, particularly those who are sedentary and likely to be the least aware of the health benefits of physical activity. For example, the main *Climbing Higher* target refers to the 5x30 standard. There is a danger that the sedentary may be put off by a target that suggests they need to move from complete inactivity to 30 minutes of exercise five times per week to get any health benefit. The Auditor General’s report explained that the 30 minutes could be broken down into 10 minute portions²¹, but we are not aware of any evidence that this is being made clear to the public. And any government exhortations to exercise more are effectively in competition with the marketing power of the major fast food chains.²²
31. Mr Jones acknowledged the need to communicate the message to the general public and that there is a public relations and communication issue to be addressed.²³ We agree: clarity on this issue, together with a more concerted awareness-raising campaign, might encourage more of the sedentary population to try a little exercise as a start to improving their health.

¹⁹ Annex A, paragraph 63 – 64, 42 – 43 and 34

²⁰ Annex A, paragraphs 208 – 209

²¹ AGW report, paragraph 3.10

²² Annex A, paragraph 121 – 122

²³ Annex A, paragraphs 49 - 52

The *Climbing Higher* strategy is not underpinned by effective arrangements that clarify roles and responsibilities, align plans and set out clear actions to achieve targets

Roles and responsibilities are not clear

32. We wonder whether the lack of leadership and coordination are symptomatic of wider weaknesses in the way that the Assembly Government formulates and implements policy strategies. Given the lack of progress made on so many fronts, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that *Climbing Higher* was launched with little thought on how it would be delivered. As the Auditor General reported, the delivery chain involved in physical activity is complex.²⁴ If the aspirations set out in *Climbing Higher* are to be realised, it is essential that local government and other public sector bodies are fully committed to achieving the targets and are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities. Establishing clarity and consensus on the parts key partners are expected to play should be built into the development of a strategy such as *Climbing Higher* from the outset.
33. Mr Brodie told us that he and his colleagues are clear about the role that they expect local government to play, and Mr Jones explained how the Sports Council are working towards strategic-level buy-in from local authorities.²⁵ However, Mr Brodie also stressed that persuading local authorities to be as involved as the Assembly Government wants them to be was a hard slog, and that winning over hearts and minds so that things could happen in a joined-up way could not be achieved overnight.²⁶ While that may be the case, it seems extraordinary to us that, at this stage in the life of *Climbing Higher*, the Assembly Government is still embroiled in such basic matters as seeking to secure buy-in from partners. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the Assembly Government can sustain the strategy and make it work while continuing to rely on a purely persuasive relationship with local government.
34. Given the lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, the current patchiness of partnership working and the lack of regional approaches described in the Auditor General's report²⁷, we wonder whether there might be merit in placing some sort of statutory obligation on local authorities in relation to provision for physical

²⁴ AGW report, paragraph 1.19 and Figure 6

²⁵ Annex A, paragraph 136 – 138, and 171

²⁶ Annex A, paragraphs 171 – 172 and 186

²⁷ AGW report, paragraphs 2.28 – 2.33

activity. We accept Mr Brodie's point that statutory obligations on local government would not be a panacea, but we do think that they might help to reduce the level of trust that the Assembly Government has to extend to authorities to deliver its policy.²⁸

Plans are not aligned

35. As increasing physical activity is an issue that cuts across government departments and its sponsored bodies, and involves other partner agencies, such as local authorities and Local Health Boards (LHBs), it is important that all relevant strategies and plans are aligned with each other and focused on delivering the *Climbing Higher* strategy. *Climbing Higher* partially set out how other policy areas can contribute to increasing physical activity, and the later *Climbing Higher – next steps document* (see paragraph 39 below) set out in greater detail the policies and plans from across government departments that contribute to developing active lifestyles.²⁹ However the Auditor General's analysis of strategies from within the Assembly Government, and from Assembly Government Sponsored Bodies, including the Sports Council, found a number of deficiencies in the way that these strategies aligned with the aspirations set out in *Climbing Higher*.³⁰ For example there is no mention of physical activity in 'the Learning Country: Vision into Action' and no mention of *Climbing Higher* in the 'Play Policy Implementation Plan'.³¹ That is extraordinary. We also wonder what is being done to ensure that the public health strategic framework overseen by Dr Jewell's department, and Mr Brodie's *Climbing Higher* action plan are consistent.
36. Furthermore, local Health, Social Care and Well-being strategies, developed jointly by local authorities and LHBs, are central to the delivery of local health issues but did not highlight physical activity as a particularly high priority.³² However we were encouraged to hear from witnesses that the Assembly Government issued new guidance in autumn 2007 on the formulation of the next round of Health, Social Care and Well-being strategies. The guidance places greater emphasis on physical activity, and Dr Jewell's department are currently analysing the strategies, which were submitted in March 2008, to determine the

²⁸ Annex A, paragraphs 175 – 180

²⁹ AGW report, paragraph 2.4

³⁰ AGW report, paragraphs 2.2 – 2.7

³¹ AGW report, Figure 9

³² AGW report, paragraphs 2.15 – 2.17

extent to which physical activity has a higher profile than previously.³³ We hope that Dr Jewell is able to report back positively following this analysis.

37. Local authorities are key deliverers in increasing physical activity through the provision of sports and leisure services. They can also impact on increasing physical activity through planning, transport and environmental policies. However, the Auditor General found that many local authority community strategies, while recognising physical activity's contribution to better health and well-being, did not recognise it as an important strategic issue.³⁴ Physical activity is still generally being managed as a sports and leisure issue within local government, and cross-departmental working is not well developed as Sir Jeremy Beecham noted in his review of public services in Wales when he said that "leaders, organisers and departments...are silo based. Vertical lines of policy and performance management reinforce this culture".³⁵
38. We were pleased that Mr Jones, recognising the significance of the quotation from Sir Jeremy Beecham³⁶, was able to report some progress in this area through the development of Local Authority Partnership Agreements. Ten local authorities are currently signed up to these agreements with the other twelve following later this year. These agreements are trying to encourage local authorities to take a broader approach to increasing physical activity so that it is not just seen as a sports and leisure services issue. They allow local authorities to be more flexible with the funding provided by the Sports Council provided that the authority has cross-cutting management arrangements and a delivery plan in place, and can demonstrate improvements in performance.³⁷ Mr Jones told us that he had been speaking to local authority cabinets and chief executives across Wales in order to raise the profile of physical activity, and was able to report that he was seeing some "very positive changes".³⁸ We were also pleased to hear about some examples of cooperation on the ground that are happening despite the lack of strategic coordination, such as Mentro Allan, the North-West Wales Outdoor Partnership, and the Physical Education and School

³³ Annex A, paragraphs 141 and 148 – 151

³⁴ AGW report, paragraph 2.12

³⁵ AGW report, paragraph 2.13

³⁶ Annex A, paragraphs 134 – 136

³⁷ Annex A, paragraphs 31, and 136 – 139

³⁸ Annex A, paragraph 138

Sport scheme.³⁹ However, we believe much more needs to be done at a strategic level to align plans and coordinate action more effectively.

There is no action plan in place to support *Climbing Higher*

39. While there are pockets of good practice, mainly at the local level, in taking an integrated and coordinated approach, there are also examples of poor coordination, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, mainly at the national level. One reason for this – and the lack of alignment among strategies and plans – is the absence of an effective action plan to accompany *Climbing Higher*. Although the Assembly Government published *Climbing Higher – next steps* in July 2006, some 18 months after the publication of the original strategy, this was not an action plan setting out in some detail who should do what, but a description of how additional spending of £15.6 million would be spent over the next two years.⁴⁰
40. Mr Brodie told us that the Assembly Government was working on an action plan, intending to consult on it in the autumn and publish it in the spring of 2009.⁴¹ This will mean that the action plan needed to give real substance to the aspirations set out in *Climbing Higher* will not be in place until some four and a half years after its launch. This is unacceptable (particularly as there is a commitment in the strategy itself to carry out four-yearly evaluations⁴²). We do not, therefore, accept Mr Brodie's assertion that producing an action plan sooner than is being planned would have amounted to "rushing it". We accept the need, as set out by Mr Brodie, to do the job properly, to do the spadework to get it right.⁴³ But underpinning a strategy with an action plan is good practice, and giving consideration to implementation at the time of formulating any strategy should be a pre-requisite. The Auditor General noted that local authorities have expressed frustration at the time lag of around 18 months between the publication of *Climbing Higher* and the production of *Climbing Higher – next steps*.⁴⁴ We echo this frustration, and wonder whether the continued absence of

³⁹ AGW report, Case study 6, page 37, Case study 7 page 38, and Appendix 3, page 54

⁴⁰ AGW report, paragraphs 2.19 and 2.22

⁴¹ Annex A, paragraph 26

⁴² Annex A, paragraph 3.6 third bullet point

⁴³ Annex A, paragraph 156

⁴⁴ AGW report, paragraph 2.22

an action plan means that the Assembly Government is in danger of losing all credibility with local government.

41. We consider that the Assembly Government should, as a matter of urgency, expedite a plan that sets out how departments and sponsored bodies will coordinate and report on activities that contribute to increasing physical activity, along with local partners. In our opinion this would go a long way to untangling the very complex delivery chain of organisations involved in efforts to increase physical activity.

Funding for physical activity is not well coordinated and its effectiveness has not been appraised

42. Funding for schemes aimed at increasing physical activity is available from many sources, but funding tends to be short term in nature when compared to *Climbing Higher's* 20-year horizon. Short-term funding presents a number of problems for organisations running schemes, such as hindering recruitment. An alternative approach would be to enable organisations requiring funding for locally-designed schemes to bid from a central pot of money. While such an approach might also encourage innovation, it would also be important to ensure that local projects were aligned with national priorities, and that evaluation methods were consistent.⁴⁵
43. There has been some progress on this front, in that the Local Authority Partnership Agreements now allow local authorities the flexibility to develop local solutions but also give the security of three year funding. There is already some stability of funding with the Dragon Sport scheme and Disability Sport Wales programme having been running for over five years.⁴⁶
44. However, we are disappointed that the Assembly Government has not progressed beyond “working on” the Auditor General’s recommendation to “carry out a detailed assessment of its funding strategy for supporting physical activity and delivering *Climbing Higher* targets.”⁴⁷ We are concerned that without a fundamental review of spending on physical activity, it will be difficult to plan future interventions effectively and make the best use of scarce resources. We also see a review of spending as a key element in the formulation of the integrated action plan that is in development; the plan needs to be underpinned

⁴⁵ AGW report, paragraphs 2.24 – 2.27

⁴⁶ Annex A, paragraphs 160 – 162

⁴⁷ Annex A, paragraph 160

by funding schemes that enable it to be sustainable for the life of the *Climbing Higher* targets.

45. On a specific point, we see the need for any review to address funding support for the voluntary sector. Witnesses agreed with us that a great deal of recreational and sporting activity in the community is delivered by the voluntary sector, often in deprived areas with very little funding, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales. Many voluntary groups find it very difficult to sustain themselves, and quite often find that access to local authority facilities is difficult as costs can be prohibitive.⁴⁸
46. At a strategic level, the public sector approach to providing for sport and recreation has remained broadly the same for the last three decades or so and is based predominantly on the provision of built facilities. However, adult participation in sport has remained broadly static over that period, and over £200 million is needed merely to sustain existing leisure facilities. These factors point to the need for new approaches to increasing physical activity, and the need to fundamentally challenge current public sector approaches to increasing physical activity. The Sports Council is quoted as saying “if we keep on doing what we have always done, we will always get what we always got”.⁴⁹ We heard from Mr Jones that there are too many community buildings with too little funds to maintain them, and that there needs to be a reconfiguration of some of these buildings. We are pleased to hear that the Sports Council has been working with some local authorities to try to address some of these building issues and that the Assembly Government is investigating how projects might be configured to include community-based sport and leisure facilities.⁵⁰
47. We agree with the need to look at different approaches if we are to make serious inroads into what can be an intractable problem. But we also consider that leisure centre provision continues to be an important resource in getting people more active, as they are often the first port of call for those wishing to increase their physical activity. However, many leisure facilities in Wales are coming to the end of their useful lives, and we are concerned that a lack of funding will lead to closure for some of them. We fully support the need for rationalisation where appropriate, but only where there is evidence of more effective ways of utilising

⁴⁸ Annex A, paragraphs 65 – 72

⁴⁹ AGW report, paragraphs 3.1 – 3.2

⁵⁰ Annex A, paragraphs 144 – 146

resources to create opportunities for people to be more active. To this end we would like to see the review of funding include an assessment of the funding that currently supports the leisure centre infrastructure in Wales.

There are no robust measures in place that can evaluate progress against targets or inform the future policy direction of the *Climbing Higher* strategy

48. The Auditor General pointed out that, in order to be able to challenge current approaches and to look at new and innovative ways of increasing physical activity, there must be a robust approach to evaluating the impact that current approaches are having. There needs to be a sound evidence base on which to assess progress; clear and unambiguous measures of the impact of interventions; and robust scrutiny mechanisms in place to support policy making.⁵¹
49. Neither *Climbing Higher* nor *Climbing Higher – next steps* set out evaluation mechanisms or performance management arrangements detailing how targets are to be measured and progress evaluated. The Auditor General’s report pointed to some major drawbacks in a number of the 11 *Climbing Higher* targets relevant for increasing physical activity: the lack of clear (or any) mechanisms for measurement, the absence of baselines against which to measure progress, and the lack of interim milestone measures.⁵² These flaws make it very difficult to assess whether current approaches or new initiatives are having an impact. Witnesses acknowledged the difficulties with evaluating some of the targets, expressing concerns about how robust the data was, and Mr Brodie agreed that the Assembly Government needed to be a lot sharper in measuring progress towards the targets”.⁵³ Such weaknesses in the targets may be the reason why only 10 of the 22 local authorities in Wales had specifically aligned their own targets to complement the ones in *Climbing Higher*.⁵⁴
50. Two of the most problematic targets relate to the 5x30 standard for adults and the 5x60 standard for primary and secondary school aged children.⁵⁵ These are the key targets by which the Assembly Government assesses progress in increasing physical activity, but weaknesses in these targets and the way they

⁵¹ AGW report, paragraphs 3.2 – 3.3

⁵² AGW report, paragraph 3.6

⁵³ Annex A, paragraphs 54, 56 and 46

⁵⁴ AGW report, paragraph 3.4

⁵⁵ AGW report, paragraph 3.8; Annex A, paragraphs 49 – 50, 54 and 56 – 58

are measured mean that reported performance cannot be relied on. It was disappointing, therefore, to hear that the figures for adults quoted in the Auditor General's report, for 2004-05, are the most up to date available, although the more recent 2006 figures for children do show an increase in activity levels.⁵⁶ The Auditor General reported the odd situation whereby two different data sources on adult physical activity levels were available – the Welsh Health Survey and the Sports Council participation survey.⁵⁷ Mr Brodie was able to tell us that from now data from the Welsh Health survey will be used to track progress,⁵⁸ even though *Climbing Higher* and the successor next steps document refer to Sports Council data.

51. Mr Brodie and Mr Evans told us that a key element of the action plan that they intend to produce in spring 2009 will be a research and evaluation framework that is being developed by an internal research and evaluation group. This group will review the 11 *Climbing Higher* targets, and will adjust or discard existing targets as necessary.⁵⁹ Mr Jones added that, through the Local Authority Partnership Agreements, the Sports Council was developing mechanisms for monitoring initiatives based on the outcomes that they produce rather than on inputs or outputs.⁶⁰
52. The recognition that targets may not be fit for purpose and will be reviewed is welcome; on the other hand it is also further evidence that the *Climbing Higher* strategy was poorly thought out at the outset, in terms of not only its implementation, but also its measures of success. The Wanless report, 'The review of Health and Social Care in Wales' produced in 2003, recommended "that the Assembly Government should bring forward policies only alongside a published evidence base, including costings and evaluation criteria". This advice was clearly not heeded in the case of the *Climbing Higher* strategy.⁶¹ As a result, the Assembly Government is now in a situation where it has resolved to undertake a review four years into the life of *Climbing Higher*, but has limited baseline data, limited reliable evidence of performance, and may now be changing some of its targets.

⁵⁶ Annex A, paragraph 53

⁵⁷ AGW report, paragraph 1.6

⁵⁸ Annex A, paragraph 2.40

⁵⁹ Annex A, paragraphs 46, 48 and 213

⁶⁰ Annex A, paragraphs 178 – 179

⁶¹ AGW report, paragraph 3.7

The Free swimming initiative is an example of evaluation not being considered at design stage

53. Weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation are exemplified in the Assembly Government's Free Swimming initiative, launched in 2003. The pilot initiative comprises two schemes: one targeted at those aged 16 and under during school holidays, and the other targeted at the 60+ age group outside the school holidays. The schemes are currently funded by the Assembly Government at around £5 million a year and, since 2006, have been administered by the Sports Council.⁶²
54. The Auditor General reported that there were difficulties in evaluating the initiative from the outset. Evaluation mechanisms were not built in at the design stage and no guidance was issued to local authorities on monitoring the schemes. Monitoring was therefore inconsistent and data collection poor, both in terms of the level and quality of data. Independent researchers from the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) were employed from November 2004 to evaluate the schemes and produced a number of interim reports. Interim reports included comments such as "the difficulties experienced may also reflect a genuine lack of awareness by some to understand the value of data collection and programme monitoring" and "there is no common format or expectation that reporting would be against common performance indicators".⁶³
55. Nevertheless, we are pleased that Mr Jones was able to provide us with the February 2008 final evaluation of the pilot scheme. The evaluation assesses the management and implementation of the schemes and also the extent that the schemes have increased swimming participation. We are pleased to note that the schemes have increased participation in both age groups, that more than half of 10-14 year olds have participated in the scheme, and that the scheme has had a positive impact in Communities First areas. However the evaluation also highlighted inconsistencies in the way the scheme is delivered in terms of availability and coverage and, perhaps more worryingly, concerns from local authorities over whether the schemes could make a significant contribution to the aims of *Climbing Higher*. These concerns relate to whether the scheme can generate regular year-round participation, the rationale of selecting the 60+

⁶² AGW report, paragraphs 2.21 and Box 4

⁶³ AGW report, Case Study 9, page 43

group as opposed to 50+, as other Assembly Government policies do, and to how effective targeting swimming is as opposed to other forms of activity.⁶⁴

56. However, we note that the evaluation does not evaluate the potential health gains associated with the schemes; nor does it address whether the schemes provide value for money. Despite the fact that the pilot schemes have been running for over five years and have cost over £25 million, we still, therefore, do not know whether free swimming is the best way to encourage people to take part in physical activity, or whether there could be better ways to spend £5 million every year. This is particularly important when you consider that the scheme forms an important plank in implementing the Child Poverty strategy, “*A Fair Future for our Children*”. There needs to be robust evaluation to understand whether the scheme is having the desired effect, or whether other initiatives or schemes may make better use of the funding.
57. Furthermore, we note that the Assembly Government has not implemented the recommendations of the Auditor General in relation to the free swimming initiative.⁶⁵ We urge the Assembly Government to act swiftly now on the evaluation report’s findings, and also to expedite its response to the Auditor General’s recommendations made over a year ago.

⁶⁴ Sports Council for Wales: Free Swimming – an evaluation of the Welsh Assembly Government’s initiative

⁶⁵ AGW report, recommendations v (a – d), page 11; Annex A, paragraphs 219 – 220

Annex A



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Archwilio
The Audit Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 5 Mehefin 2008
Thursday, 5 June 2008**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Chris Franks	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janice Gregory	Llafur Labour
Lesley Griffiths	Llafur Labour
Irene James	Llafur Labour
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Huw Lewis	Llafur Labour
David Melding	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Gillian Body	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Huw Brodie	Cyfarwyddwr Materion Gwledig a Threftadaeth, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Director, Rural Affairs and Heritage, Welsh Assembly Government
Jeremy Colman	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales
Gwilym Evans	Pennaeth Cangen Loteri a Phrif Ddigwyddiadau, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Lottery and Major Events Branch, Welsh Assembly Government
Ian Gibson	Is-bennaeth, Yr Uned Llywodraethu Corfforaethol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Deputy Head, Corporate Governance Unit, Welsh Assembly Government
Dr Tony Jewell	Prif Swyddog Meddygol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Chief Medical Officer, Welsh Assembly Government
Huw Jones	Prif Weithredwr, Cyngor Chwaraeon Cymru Chief Executive, Sports Council of Wales
Elaine McNish	Arbenigwr Gweithgarwch Corfforol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Physical Activity Specialist, Welsh Assembly Government
Huw Rees	Arbenigwr Perfformiad, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Performance Specialist, Wales Audit Office

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

John Grimes	Clerc Clerk
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Abigail Phillips

Dirprwy Glerc
Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.*

Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **David Melding:** Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the Audit Committee.

[2] I will start with the usual housekeeping announcements. The proceedings will be conducted in Welsh and English. When Welsh is spoken, a translation will be available on channel 1 on the headsets. Those who are hard of hearing may wish to amplify our proceedings by listening to channel 0. Please switch off any items of electronic equipment—do not leave them on silent—as they can interfere with our recording equipment. We do not anticipate a fire exercise today so, in the event of a fire alarm, please take it seriously and follow the instructions of the ushers on how to leave the building safely.

[3] We have apologies from Lorraine Barrett and Darren Millar. I understand that a couple of Members are running a little late and will join us presently.

9.31 a.m.

Cynyddu Gweithgarwch Cofforol Increasing Physical Activity

[4] **David Melding:** Agenda item 2 is to discuss the findings of the Auditor General for Wales's report 'Increasing physical activity', which deals with an important topic that has the potential to provide significant gains for the health of the people of Wales. However, increasing people's physical activity—by which we do not necessarily mean sporting activities—is not an easy task for Government, even when the health and other gains are clear, as it may require lifestyle changes. The report shows that, despite the good intentions set out in the strategy document 'Climbing Higher', the Assembly Government still has some way to go to achieve a fully co-ordinated approach across all the bodies that have a role to play in increasing physical activity. I should also draw Members' attention to the fact that, as the Auditor General's report was published almost a year ago, we will need to establish what has happened since then.

[5] I welcome our witnesses. Perhaps they can introduce themselves formally for the record.

[6] **Mr Brodie:** I am Huw Brodie. I am the director of rural affairs and heritage.

[7] **Mr Jones:** I am Huw Jones. I am chief executive of the Sports Council for Wales.

[8] **Dr Jewell:** I am Dr Tony Jewell. I am chief medical officer for Wales and head of the Department for Public Health and Health Professions.

[9] **Ms McNish:** I am Elaine McNish. I am a physical activity specialist.

[10] **Mr Evans:** I am Gwilym Evans. I am head of lottery and major events.

[11] **Eleanor Burnham:** Excuse me, but I did not hear what Elaine McNish said.

[12] **Ms McNish:** I am a physical activity specialist based in the Department for Public Health and Health Professions.

[13] **David Melding:** I welcome all our witnesses. I think that they are all experienced in how the Audit Committee undertakes its work. Members will put a range of questions. For each question, perhaps someone can indicate who will provide an answer, but anyone else who has relevant evidence can indicate that to me and I will try to bring them in as well.

[14] I will start by asking all the witnesses what priority the Assembly Government and the Sports Council for Wales give to increasing physical activity. Perhaps people can make some general remarks and we can then drill down into the detail as we go through the proceedings. Does Mr Brodie want to start?

[15] **Mr Brodie:** First, let me say that we regard the report overall as fair and constructive. I am sure that the report will help us as we try to take the agenda forward. As has been said, increasing physical activity requires a great deal of team work not only within the Assembly Government but between us and a range of external parties as well as across all the different local authority departments. The issue is a test of coherent working at a number of different levels. It might be useful to ask Tony Jewell to say a little bit about the way in which we are seeking to develop the public health strategic framework, which is an important part of the context that will help the committee to understand how we are going forward.

[16] **David Melding:** I ask Dr Jewell to cover that, please, in terms of the weight that is placed on lack of physical activity as a determinant of poor health compared with other factors. Is increasing physical activity a particularly high priority or a crucial area for improving the general health of the public?

[17] **Dr Jewell:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everyone. The good-news story is that we have cross-Government commitment to producing a public health strategic framework for Wales called 'a healthy future'. It has been agreed through Cabinet, and leadership on it will go through me, together with the Minister for Health and Social Services. Essentially, it is a cross-Government commitment, which was agreed back in November 2007. The strategic framework is just that: it is meant to be a framework to provide a steer as to how the different contributions across Government can work for the benefit of public health in Wales. It is not a detailed plan or a *Yellow Pages*; the aim is to provide a framework.

[18] One of the report's criticisms is that it is not clear who is doing what in Wales or how things fit together. The strategic framework will provide a steer as to how contributions across Government departments may be made and how work by local government, the voluntary sector and individuals can contribute to the endeavour to improve the health of the population of Wales and reduce inequalities. That is a good bit of news, which is consistent with the one Wales commitment of the coalition Government. I will quote from the 'One Wales' document:

[19] 'We are passionate about delivering significant improvements in the health of all of the people of Wales. We recognise the need to work harder to improve the well-being of all vulnerable and disadvantaged in Wales'.

[20] The goal is as described in 'One Wales': a healthy future. In order to achieve that, we have established some thematic working groups under the following headings: socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions, which is a big topic and an important group; children and young people, to get the message across about early years; healthy eating, food and fitness, which provides the link between what we eat and what we do by way of

physical activity; health-related behaviours and risks, which covers big issues such as tobacco and alcohol, as well as physical activity and people's way of life; limiting long-term health conditions, which links to the ageing population and chronic conditions; mental health and wellbeing, which is an area in which physical activity is a benefit; and strengthening the delivery system for public health in Wales.

[21] The lead thematic group is healthy eating, food and fitness. We have tasked that group with examining issues around physical activity, although all the groups will be considering the contribution of physical activity as part of their work. The idea is for us to produce an engagement document this summer in order to encourage public engagement in the process. There will be a formal consultation—early next year, we hope—and the framework will be effective from 2009 to 2020. That is the strategic timeframe.

[22] All the thematic groups have stakeholder engagement. Two of the theme groups are chaired by local authority chief executives; some are chaired by officials; and some are chaired by national public health colleagues. The thematic groups are mixed groups, and they include the voluntary sector. We seek engagement with stakeholders through the process.

[23] To answer the question, we have cross-Government commitment to a public health strategic framework. Physical activity is central to that—it is one of the best buys for public health. We hope that the output from our work will be a framework in which everyone can see the role that they play in our combined efforts to improve the health of the population and reduce inequalities.

[24] **Mr Brodie:** I will add a few words about how we are taking forward the response to the report.

[25] **David Melding:** We will be drilling into the detail later, so let us keep these remarks general. We are already touching on points that we want to follow up. However, I do not want to stop you.

[26] **Mr Brodie:** I will be brief. The framework that Tony Jewell describes is the overall strategic context. Within that, we are working up an action plan on physical activity. We aim to have a formal public consultation on it this autumn, with a view to publication next spring. The action plan will set out how the coherent response to the report will be implemented.

9.40 a.m.

[27] **David Melding:** I am sure that members will want to talk about the detail, the timescale and whether the response has been as swift as we would like it to be.

[28] Does Mr Jones want to add anything on the priority that the Sports Council gives the issue in relation to the Government's commitment to increasing physical activity, which obviously goes well beyond just sporting activity and way beyond elite sporting activity?

[29] **Mr Jones:** We look at three areas: children, young people and adults. I will outline the main programmes that we have in place. About 140,000 children take part in Dragon Sport, which touches about 95 per cent of primary schools in Wales. That has been rolled out over the past five or six years.

[30] We are currently rolling out the 5x60 scheme. In its first year, 70,000 pupils have been involved in the scheme. It is targeted at those secondary school age pupils who do not get the opportunity to take part in sport. It is aimed not at those who are in the first-11 football team or the first-seven netball team but at the child or young person who does not have those opportunities.

[31] The third area is targeted very much at adults. We have been trying to do two things. First, we do not have the resources, human or financial, to target everybody in Wales, so we are looking at case studies to examine where we can make a difference and establish what the issues are. Secondly, we are dealing with local authorities and developing local authority partnership agreements to try to get our local authority partners to take a much broader approach, so that the issue is not seen as a leisure department problem or challenge. I have been going around many local authorities to speak to cabinets and chief executives to try to engage them in the process and to highlight the importance of physical activity. To be fair to many of those local authorities, they have looked at the matter very positively when I have drawn the issues that Tony Jewell mentioned to their attention.

[32] **Bethan Jenkins:** Thank you for appearing before the committee today. I will concentrate on the content of the report. Paragraphs 1.6 and 1.9 report that almost half the population of Wales is inactive and that the greatest scope for health improvement through physical activity lies in that sedentary population. What is the Assembly Government and its partners doing to encourage those who are totally inactive to engage in any form of physical activity?

[33] **Mr Brodie:** Does Tony Jewell want to talk about the referral schemes?

[34] **Dr Jewell:** We take the point about the target population being the sedentary population, because the potential health gain for those people is huge. One aim of Health Challenge Wales, which has had an advertising campaign over the past three months, is to try to get the message across that taking even a small step, as it were, to increase physical activity will benefit individuals. We are not talking about people who are already enlisted with sporting groups. The sedentary population is at one end of the spectrum. We are aware that, sadly, a high proportion of the population is essentially sedentary, including quite a lot of young people. We are trying to get the message across that even a small amount of additional physical activity—such as walking to the shops, doing gardening or walking up the stairs instead of taking the lift—will benefit individuals. Health Challenge Wales has been promoting the message that everyday activities will benefit individuals, so they should start to do them.

[35] At the other end of the spectrum are people who come to the attention of the health services, such as general practitioner services, exhibiting blood pressure problems, obesity and risks of heart disease. We are investing £3.4 million extra every year over the next three years to support exercise referral schemes throughout Wales and to try to get people who are already identified as being particularly at risk into supervised activity. All those schemes have a national evaluation attached to them to ensure that we know that the investment provides benefits.

[36] There are two ends to the spectrum. At one end, we take a population approach to try to get through to the high proportion of people who need to get going and tell them to turn the telly off from time to time, get walking and take the stairs rather than the lift. We have some Health Challenge Wales signs to encourage people to do that. At the other extreme, the people who attend primary care services and are identified as being at risk and essentially sedentary are referred to a safe environment of supervised exercise schemes to get them started on the road to exercise. Between those extremes, there are lots of other examples.

[37] **Mr Brodie:** We are trying to bring about a general cultural change. To that extent, it would be difficult to target the intervention precisely and simply focus on people who are completely sedentary or, alternatively, on people whom we could get to take 30 minutes of exercise five times a week; we must take a combination of approaches. We are keen to focus

effort as far as we can on areas in which there is likely to be a high prevalence of ill health and physical activity issues. It might be useful if Huw Jones says a little bit about the practical attempts that the Sports Council for Wales is making to segment the market a bit. However, we should not think that it is a clinical matter of deciding to do this or that: we must try to help all people in Wales achieve the standard.

[38] **Mr Jones:** I suspect that the committee is a microcosm of the population. If we look around the room, we cannot know who does 30 minutes of physical activity five times a week, who exercises once or twice a week or who does nothing, because none of us walks around with a badge or label.

[39] That demonstrates the challenge that we face with the population. At the moment, we are asking, 'What do we know?' We know the social demography of Wales and who has the greatest tendency to participate in sport and physical activity. Coupled with that, we are undertaking a market segmentation analysis, which is intended to assist our partners in local authorities in particular to identify the communities—it can get down almost to street level—in which there is a higher probability that people will be inactive. That is on the go at the moment, and I hope that we will roll it out over the next couple of months.

[40] There is a stereotype that links inactivity with deprived communities, but we must be careful about that because the situation is not quite as simple as that. One thing that focused our minds recently was the development of the JJB Sports fitness club in Merthyr Tydfil. Most people would have thought that that was the last place where somebody would open a private sector facility of that kind, but it has been hugely successful. Many people in deprived communities are physically active, but certain groups are not. The challenge for us is to target those individuals.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** You said that you need to include the people who are totally inactive and those who are active. Are people put off by the target of exercising five times a week? Do they consider it unachievable and does that put them off doing anything?

[42] **Mr Brodie:** I will let Huw Jones comment on that. However, the key point that we want to stress is that, if we simply try to focus on getting people to go to a leisure centre five times a week, we are bound to fail. The trick is to get people to build physical activity into the structure of their daily lives. We also achieve benefits for the wider sustainable development agenda through people building walking and cycling into their travel patterns. That is the joined-up approach that the report makes clear is the path to success.

9.50 a.m.

[43] **Mr Jones:** The phrase that we have adopted is 'doorstep activities'. As Huw Brodie rightly said, we will not get people to say suddenly, 'I'm going to join a football club', or, 'I'm going to go down the leisure centre five times a week'. The first challenge is to get people out of their doors, and to get them to make a commitment, for example, to walk to the shops, to walk or cycle to work, or to get off the bus a stop early. We have a sedentary population so we have to move, literally, in single steps. That is the kind of approach that we are trying to get local authorities to adopt in the local authority partnership agreements. We want local authority departments to consider how they can engage with other departments to change the culture within communities. A lot of work has to be done.

[44] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to ask a quick question about another part of the report. Paragraph 1.12 talks about the targets in the 'Climbing Higher' strategy. The aim is to increase the physical activity of adults and children to the 5x30 minutes and the 5x60 minutes standards respectively.

[45] My question is for Huw Brodie. What progress has been made towards those targets since the strategy was launched three and a half years ago? How are you communicating with the public on the need to reach those targets?

[46] **Mr Brodie:** One point highlighted in 'Increasing physical activity' is that we need to be a lot sharper in measuring progress towards the targets. To work on that, we have set up an internal research and evaluation group. The group has clarified how we are measuring progress towards targets, including the 5x30 minutes target.

[47] If we look at the figures, we see that we cannot be at all complacent. In the new approach that we are developing, we will have to work very hard to get the messages across. Doing so will depend on having a coherent approach at local level. Gwilym Evans might want to add something to that.

[48] **Mr Evans:** Only to say that Huw Brodie is absolutely right. In his opening remarks, he mentioned the action plan that we are developing. A key element of that action plan will be a research and evaluation framework. The 11 or so targets in the 'Climbing Higher' strategy will be reviewed. Some may be tweaked and some may be dropped, although it is too early to say. However, we certainly need to have greater clarity about what we mean by setting the targets and who will be responsible for delivering them. The action plan will be the vehicle for taking the work forward.

[49] **David Melding:** There is a problem at the moment. We have heard from Mr Jones and Dr Jewell about the culture and about getting people to walk to the shops or do a bit of gardening, but because activities will be measured against the target of 5x30 minutes a week, such people will still be recorded as inactive, will they not?

[50] **Mr Jones:** The definition of physical activity is very broad. The target is 5x30 minutes of physical activity, but that can be broken down into 10-minute chunks.

[51] **David Melding:** Where is that made clear? I have not really picked that message up. I realise that it is mentioned in the report, but I think that the public is thinking in terms of having to do 30 minutes of swimming or walking, otherwise it does not count.

[52] **Mr Jones:** That is a fair comment. However, I think that the point is made clear in the data collection and in the targets that are set out in the 'Climbing Higher' strategy. A public relations and communications issue arises here. We have to communicate our message to the general public.

[53] We can show that levels of activity have recently improved significantly. The figures on adults in the report are the most up to date that we have. Back in 2002, about 40 per cent of children were doing 5x60 minutes. In 2004, the figure rose to 42 per cent and in 2006 it rose to 44 per cent. For secondary school age children, the figure remained at 24 per cent in 2004, but rose to 35 per cent in 2006.

[54] Underpinning that, we have figures that show the levels of activity in communities. We need to be careful with the figures, particularly on the 5x30 minutes and 5x60 minutes targets, because they are difficult to measure—they are statistically difficult. I have concerns about how robust the figures will be over a period, so we need other measurements to underpin progress.

[55] **David Melding:** Is that accepted by the Welsh Assembly Government?

[56] **Mr Brodie:** Absolutely. There is a difficulty with evaluation and how people score moderate exercise. When people are asked in a survey how active they are, how do we ensure

that they interpret the questions appropriately? I totally agree with Huw Jones's point.

[57] **Mr Jones:** I turn to some of the participation figures on the matters that we can affect and seek to influence, such as extracurricular activity in schools and club membership among young people. Back in 1997, when 40 per cent of primary school age children were involved in extracurricular activity, we set a target of 70 per cent. By 2004, we had achieved a figure of 80 per cent and, in 2006, we were at 84 per cent. In 1997, just under 50 per cent of secondary school age children were involved in extracurricular activity. We set a target of 60 per cent by 2005, but by then we had reached 71 per cent and we are now at 77 per cent. Therefore, on the matters that we can influence by working with our partners in schools and local authorities, there is a lot of good news about what we can do. However, how that translates into the target of 5x60 minutes of physical activity is a slightly different matter and a difficult challenge.

[58] **David Melding:** I am keen to move on. You have acknowledged that that indicator needs work if it is to be communicated effectively.

[59] Irene James is trying to attract my attention. Is it a small point, Irene?

[60] **Irene James:** It is very small. Huw Jones mentioned the number of extracurricular hours, but is that specific to sport? Not all school extracurricular activities are sport based.

[61] **Mr Jones:** That is all sport.

[62] **Huw Lewis:** Paragraphs 1.15 and 1.16 discuss the behavioural issues that are connected to changing people's habits and point out that the behavioural barriers can be complex. In box 1, the report refers to the success of social marketing techniques in overcoming those behavioural barriers in countries such as Canada and Finland. Will we go down the same road? Are there plans to use social marketing in Wales?

[63] **Ms McNish:** You are right about the problems in creating behavioural change. Social marketing is one available tool, but we are investigating many others. For example, in the exercise referral scheme, we have built in a strong measure of motivational interviewing, which uses specific techniques including goal setting to try to create behaviour change. The approach is to help people by taking them by the hand and creating a context in which they want to change their behaviour because doing so is important to them. We must also take a broader view and consider whether the environment is appropriate for people to be active. We work closely with planners and transport planners on those issues. Several other measures are being taken.

[64] We have made first moves on social marketing through the health challenge Wales campaign. Part of the approach is about small steps making a big difference. The campaign targets sedentary people and aims to enable them to see that they do not have to dress up in Lycra and bounce up and down to be fit—it is about building small steps into their lives. The aim is to make taking physical activity an easy step for people, because we know that a small difference has huge health gains.

10.00 a.m.

[65] **Huw Lewis:** Just to follow that up, I want to go back a little. The socioeconomic outline of the problem was mentioned. Although we should not get hung up on it, all the public health statistics show that the more deprived communities in Wales have the biggest health problems: there must be a strong connection created between physical activity and exercise and those communities. Are we going to take a serious look at that?

[66] My constituency is largely deprived, and almost all of it is covered by the Communities First programme. A lot of the sporting activity for younger people in the area is delivered by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales, which is routinely and regularly overlooked for funding support by the Assembly. Could we take a look at that? Such organisations concentrate on more deprived areas. Where does that overlap with the child poverty action plan, which covers all the wings of the Assembly's activity and contains targets that relate to the public health initiative, particularly for diet and exercise?

[67] Another example in the report is the terrible lack of engagement between deprived communities and the outdoor environment of Wales. In many deprived communities, the outdoor environment is becoming better and better all the time, but the people who live right next door to it do not use it. I contend that they do not feel that they have the skills and confidence to do things in the outdoor environment. The Brecon Beacons are crawling with visitors from Birmingham and so on, but precious few people from Dowlais are climbing them.

[68] I was a bit nervous earlier when Huw Brodie, I think it was, said that the problems are not just socioeconomic. That is true, although a huge amount of them are. Are we going to consider those who are already engaged with deprived communities, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales, and are we taking cognisance of the child poverty action plan, which impacts on the issue?

[69] **Mr Brodie:** I will start off on that. I have a great deal of sympathy for what Huw Lewis is saying. Voluntary groups are going to be key in delivering progress, but we have to take coherent action at local level: local authorities are at the heart of ensuring that it happens. For us, as an Assembly Government, to decide to pull a particular lever for a particular voluntary organisation at the all-Wales level could be quite disruptive to our attempts at getting coherent action that will make the most sense in a particular local authority area. Activity is likely to vary across Wales.

[70] We certainly want local authorities to follow up all those points, and we want to support them and encourage them to do that. A number of points in the report underline the fact that our funding mechanisms have to have the flexibility to allow local solutions.

[71] We are very conscious of the point that Huw Lewis made about the outdoors: that is being played very strongly in the Heads of the Valleys regeneration project. Indeed, work is being done with the Countryside Council for Wales and the national parks. Huw Jones might want to supplement what I have said.

[72] **Mr Jones:** Mr Brodie is absolutely right. We face significant challenges in getting people into places such as the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia, but we also have problems getting them out of their homes, which is the first step. We have a number of initiatives, and we produced a recent report—it is in the process of being published—on outdoor activities. There are fundamental issues, such as knowledge of where one can go for a walk. It seems to be fairly obvious, but many people are saying that to us about their local green space, park or whatever. People must have the confidence to get out, especially if it involves an activity. Even simple things, such as fishing or canoeing, require some technical expertise and therefore some sort of tuition. We need to consider such issues.

[73] We have very good scheme in the north-west Wales outdoor pursuits initiative, which is based on the fact that many people who live in Snowdonia do not go out of their houses in Llanberis to utilise the wider outdoors. We have started to get young people involved in leadership initiatives, so that they can lead walking groups at a low level—not climbing up Snowdon or anything—around their community. We are also trying to get them into such activities so that they can progress, for example, to the mountain leadership certificate and

possibly get a job somewhere such as Plas y Brenin. The vast majority of instructors at the mountain centres in north Wales come in from England; we are not recruiting from local communities. To be fair, many of the centres recognise that. There is a physical activity benefit from the scheme, but there are also economic and social benefits.

[74] **Dr Jewell:** It is clear to me that inequalities will run right the way through this. The general point is that the secular trend in our surveys on health-related behaviour in school-age children—which is shown to be an international problem, as well—is a move towards sedentary activities such as watching television, surfing the internet, playing computer games and using mobile phones. Young people spend a frightening proportion of the week in sedentary activity. The surveys show the following figures for boys who participate in at least moderate activity: 11-year-olds spend 35 per cent of their time in moderate activity; 13-year-olds spend 27 per cent; and 15-year-olds spend 21 per cent. The respective figures for girls are 21 per cent, 12 per cent and 9 per cent. We are not winning, and as children get older their participation in physical activity declines. Sadly, the trend is not just for Wales, but for lots of other European and for North American countries, too. The secular trend is towards more sedentary activities that relate to computers and televisions.

[75] As far as social class is concerned, the proportion of manual labour that constitutes vigorous activity has also declined. The rise in obesity is related to the continuation of eating behaviours and patterns that supported heavy manual work, although nowadays many fewer calories are consumed in manual work. There is a tension between what people eat and what they do. Because of automation, technological developments and so on, even the workplace is, by and large, no longer a place where people get physical activity. Those are the big issues that we must confront.

[76] I want to respond to the chairman's earlier point about the difficulties in measuring how much exercise a person takes. Although I know that it is only scratching the surface, Health Challenge Wales has been distributing pedometers that count every step that a person takes, which gives them immediate feedback. If they walk to work or get off the bus one stop away from work, they can see how many steps they have taken. It may have been suggested that they should aim to take 7,000 or 10,000 steps, and people are surprised at how few steps they take. They take a walk, look at the pedometer and think, 'Is that all?'. The target number is usually very much higher than they have walked. Little tools such as pedometers, which are very cheap, can aid people.

[77] **David Melding:** Pedometers have sparked an interest.

[78] **Bethan Jenkins:** After this meeting, I am going to meet a company called Life Health Solutions, which programmes people's lifestyles and gives them a plan of action based on their life and the activities that they undertake in a day. Has the Government or the Sports Council of Wales considered rolling out such a service? I am thinking of work-based activity in businesses, for example.

[79] **David Melding:** Do so without endorsing the particular company.

10.10 a.m.

[80] **Mr Jones:** We have a number of projects at the moment. They are workplace initiatives that are subject to evaluation; we will see what their impact has been. Obviously, our challenge is to try to change people's culture and to get them to take responsibility for their own lives. We must try to make things as easy as we can for individuals whether they are at home, work or wherever.

[81] The work situation is proving to be challenging for us. Many businesses see their role

as being primarily to make profits and keep people employed; they do not necessarily see their role as being to create benefits as a result of putting physical activity into their employees' lives. I am sure that the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government face similar challenges in trying to change their cultures. We have a long way to go, but the evaluations will give us good pointers as to where strengths and weaknesses lie.

[82] **Eleanor Burnham:** Paragraph 1.25 of 'Increasing physical activity' states:

[83] 'Climbing Higher makes it clear that the main reason for seeking to increase physical activity is the potential benefits for health.'

[84] I understand that the working group that was set up to oversee the development of that strategy has not met since November 2004, despite what was asserted earlier about various other cross-thematic and cross-departmental groups working on the 'Climbing Higher' strategy. Does that show a lack of ambition or a lack of strong leadership? What progress has been made on the Auditor General for Wales's recommendation that there should be a high-level steering group? Notwithstanding the fact that we are talking about an issue that involves complex psychological, marketing and global forces, why does it appear from the outside, particularly to the Auditor General, that there has been very little progress on such a focused initiative?

[85] **Mr Brodie:** I am sure that the report was correct when it was produced, but we have outlined the structures that we now have. We have within the public health strategic framework the range of task and finish groups that Tony Jewell referred to, including the overarching healthy eating, food and fitness group. Within that umbrella, there is the 'Climbing Higher' working group, which is cross-departmental and includes representatives of a range of departments that we are using to work up the revised action plan to which I referred. Those are the cross-departmental structures that we have in place.

[86] **David Melding:** How often does that group meet?

[87] **Mr Brodie:** The group has regular meetings to progress matters.

[88] **David Melding:** Does the group meet frequently, as well as regularly? 'Regular meetings' could take place once every other year.

[89] **Mr Brodie:** I think that the healthy eating, food and fitness group has met once. The 'Climbing Higher' working group consists of a network of officials who, in addition to the meetings that they have, are in frequent and regular contact to work up the action plan. That is how things work.

[90] **Eleanor Burnham:** So you are fairly happy that, despite the Auditor General's concerns, you are—a year after the report was published—in control and leading the way.

[91] **Mr Brodie:** I do not want to give the impression that we are complacent, because getting the internal and external joining up that is required is—as we have said—a big task. However, we are giving a high profile to increasing physical activity. John Howells, who is the Welsh Assembly Government's director of culture and sport, will take a strong personal role to ensure that everything comes together.

[92] **Eleanor Burnham:** The Auditor General has recommended the appointment of a physical activity tsar—I hate to use that word. We know about the complexities that are involved. Before I come to the Assembly, I try to swim, which is a time-management issue as much as anything else. I cannot swim now, as my first committee meeting on a Tuesday starts at 8 a.m., and we are here early on Wednesdays and Thursdays. However, I try my best. I am

an intelligent human being trying to take action for myself but, with the best will in the world, time management is one of the biggest issues for all of us.

[93] If there was a tsar, which is what the Auditor General would like, what exactly would the tsar do? For instance, an issue that is close to my heart—food—has not been touched on. For many people, the quality of food is not what it used to be. There is huge concern—forgive me, because I am not a medical person like you—about hydrogenated fats being in so much of the food that we consume. What are you doing about that? Would a tsar deal with such complex issues and engage the populace? The Chair rightly said earlier that there are so many conflicting messages from whatever paper we pick up: one minute, something is good for you; the next minute, it is bad for you. The general public gets overwhelmed by that and eventually switches off. After all, it is easier for people to do what they are used to and to stay in their comfort zones. How will we get people to get out of their comfort zones? Would a tsar help?

[94] **David Melding:** Let us deal with the tsar. Are you going to crown a tsar?

[95] **Mr Brodie:** There are a number of different issues there, and I will try to take them in turn. As officials, we would need to reflect on carefully with Ministers on whether we should have a tsar internally to ensure that we co-ordinate effectively. Although the idea has superficial attractions, there are also risks and downsides.

[96] **Eleanor Burnham:** You are not convinced that there should be a tsar.

[97] **Mr Brodie:** No. I was being careful to explain. The questions are what we want a tsar for and what the boundaries would be, apart from anything else.

[98] **Eleanor Burnham:** Well, would a tsar, to open up the argument—

[99] **David Melding:** Eleanor, let us hear Mr Brodie, then I will bring you back in.

[100] **Mr Brodie:** If you are recommending to us that we ought to nominate a person at senior level to lead internally on everything to do with physical activity, there is a sense in which that sounds good. However, the potential downside is that we cannot take responsibility for physical activity and education out of the school sector. There would be a danger of weakening the approach and, potentially, of creating a different set of silos if that approach was followed through to its logical conclusion.

[101] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, you are quite convinced.

[102] **Mr Brodie:** The key matter that we think we must pursue is to have effective teamwork across the office, and to see it mirrored among external partners, particularly across the local authorities. Huw Jones described the work that we are doing on that. I am not giving a definitive answer to the recommendation; I was choosing my words carefully in saying that it is something on which we will continue to reflect.

[103] Food is a different area—

[104] **David Melding:** Hold on, I want to deal with this issue first. Because there is such a multifaceted workload, and so many departments and other bodies are involved—for example, local authorities and sports councils—the question whether a designated official at senior level should have overall responsibility is important. Do you want to return to your point, Eleanor?

[105] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am concerned because the Auditor General is concerned about

what he believes is slippage regarding focus. After four years, there does not appear to be one person taking a strong strategic lead and giving direction. That is the Auditor General's view.

[106] **Mr Brodie:** The outcome that we all want is to ensure that we have an effective, co-ordinated and coherent approach internally and externally. What will help us to achieve that? We are not wholly convinced that giving a single individual the responsibility is necessarily the best way to achieve what we want. However, we will continue to reflect on that.

[107] **David Melding:** Let us look briefly at the point about nutrition.

[108] **Eleanor Burnham:** A tsar would focus and co-ordinate all the activity. At the moment, it appears to me—and, obviously, to the Auditor General—that thematic cross-departmental activity is going on. However, the question is whether it is focused.

10.20 a.m.

[109] The 'Climbing Higher' document was focused; the focus was on the remit to increase physical activity because of the potential benefit to health. However, it appears that not much productive work has been undertaken to increase general uptake of physical activity—with its supposed benefits—as opposed to the uptake of leisure or sports activities.

[110] **Mr Brodie:** I have described our approach. We are working on the public health strategic framework, we have the action plans and we have all the work that the Sports Council for Wales is doing with local authorities. Huw Jones gave examples of local work, but there are loads more. We understand the strategic direction that we have to take, and the report is very helpful in underlining the point that we have to lay solid foundations.

[111] I do not think that having a single tsar is an end in itself, and whether having a tsar would be an appropriate means to the end is something that we continue to reflect on.

[112] **David Melding:** I am keen—

[113] **Eleanor Burnham:** Can I just—

[114] **David Melding:** No. Hear what I have to say first. I am keen to move on. We have been discussing an important question and it has been clearly answered. Whether we consider that answer to be the best fit for the evidence that we have heard is a matter for our report. I do not want to prolong a discussion along the lines of 'We should do this, and you should do that'.

[115] Do you have a new point to raise?

[116] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. I would be very interested to hear Dr Jewell's opinions on the quality of food. Much evidence exists on hydrogenated fats and other aspects of people's diets.

[117] **Dr Jewell:** Yes, it does. The public health objective is to reduce obesity, which requires a combination of measures relating to both physical activity and food. Huw Brodie was suggesting that there could be problems if we sought leadership on a specific area—from a tsar for physical activity, for example—because many public health issues involve combinations of contributions from different areas.

[118] Last year, we engaged in a debate on the quality of food in Wales, and the analysis of the results of the consultation is coming to an end. The focus of the consultation was on the quality of food, and the three components of the consultation were how to increase the

amount of fresh fruit and vegetables people eat, how to ensure that such foods are affordable, and how to ensure that production from farm to fork is sustainable. As well as being about the quality of food, the third component was in line with what 'One Wales' had to say about sustainability, climate change and inequality.

[119] Ms Burnham mentioned fats. It is clear that we have to put out simple messages. The message about the proportion of fat that we should have in our diet has been consistent for years, although the issue can be problematic when people start to discuss different kinds of fat. We try to keep the messages simple: increase fresh fruit and vegetables, reduce fat, reduce sugar and reduce salt. The three points that came out of our debate on the quality of food were that we eat too much fat and need to reduce the proportion of fat in our food, that we do not eat enough fresh fruit and vegetables and that we must reduce the amount of salt that we consume. I always try to avoid becoming too technical because that can confuse the public. The risk is that people will switch off.

[120] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have contacted the relevant Minister about planning permissions for fast-food outlets near centres of physical activity. For example, there are three fast-food outlets right beside the JJB Sports centre in Merthyr. Are such issues taken into account when you are planning with local authorities where sports centres will be placed, and when you are considering how to encourage young people to take part in more physical activity?

[121] **Dr Jewell:** The built environment is very important. I have slides of fitness centres that you get to by going up an escalator—it is amazing. When you drive into Rhyl, you see fast food outlets all the way. They are all of the sort that you mentioned.

[122] I talked earlier about television, games and the internet, but people are also confronted by the marketing of the big food outlets and producers. McDonald's is among the top 10 global brands, as is Coca-Cola: a person in the middle of Tanzania will recognise the McDonald's sign and the Coca-Cola sign. We have to take such forces into account or we end up with a fitness centre on one side and food outlets on the other. The 1986 Ottawa charter for health promotion talked about enabling people to make healthy choices. Part of that is to try to influence design, wherever possible, and to manage planning, but that is difficult because there is a free market and people are entitled to develop their businesses.

[123] **Ms McNish:** I will mention something that we have done proactively on that. In March, we had a conference at which we targeted public health people alongside planners and transport planners. The theme of the conference was how to influence the environment to promote healthy eating and physical activity. We have taken steps and introduced measures in that direction. Obviously, we are limited by planning law, but we want to raise awareness of the issues and we are making progress with further ideas on how we can pick up on those themes.

[124] **Irene James:** Paragraph 1.28 of the report states that other countries have a good record on increasing physical activity. It mentions Scotland, where the lead on physical activity is taken by the health sector rather than the sports department. My question is particularly for Huw Brodie and Tony Jewell. Given the risk that associating physical activity with sports might deter some people, what thought is being given to assigning lead responsibilities to health rather than sports officials?

[125] **Mr Brodie:** What we have said so far should convey that the work is being led from the public health angle. We have tried to explain that the public health strategic framework is the overall strategic context within which we are developing all the work. In that sense, health is leading. We are taking the point about how we work, and that is very much how things are happening.

[126] **Dr Jewell:** In the early discussion about tsars or tsarinas, my department takes the lead for the Government on public health. The development of the healthy futures public health strategic framework is being led by me and my department. Obviously, the work will need to be done across Government, as Huw Brodie described. There are examples of cross-Government committees, such as the Cabinet committee on children and young people, and we have the work on climate change. When we produce the consultation on the strategy, we perhaps need to give serious thought to the Government's approach. We need leadership on one hand but participation across Government on the other. We will consider how we get that participation across portfolios when we have produced the consultation document. We must consider how to provide figurehead leadership but ensure that the departments that contribute—sports is an important one—are at the table with ministerial agreement.

[127] **Mr Jones:** Sometimes, there is a misunderstanding about the sports council's role. Our role is not just about what most people would consider to be the traditional sporting activities of football, rugby, hockey, netball and maybe badminton—we have a much broader role. Pages 37 and 38 of the report highlight two case studies that are good examples of work on which we have been leading. The Mentro Allan project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, but we lead the national partnership on it. Most people probably do not know that sports council officers have taken the lead on that, because our branding is not all over it. The same is true of the north-west Wales outdoor partnership. We are significantly involved in activities such as walking, as well as the traditional sporting activities. We are also managing the walking the way to health scheme, which is a joint initiative between the health sector, the Countryside Council for Wales and the sports council. Those are good examples of the breadth of work that we do and of the partnerships that we are bringing together.

10.30 a.m.

[128] **David Melding:** You said that those cross-party groups or departmental groups are trying to produce an integrated approach to increasing physical activity. 'Climbing Higher' also says that increasing 'physical literacy'—I think that that is the phrase—is an important objective, yet there is no mention of physical activity in 'The Learning Country: Vision into Action'. How on earth did that happen?

[129] **Mr Brodie:** We are very conscious of the need to ensure that all relevant departments play their part. That is certainly what we are trying to address in the action plan that we are developing. As you imply, education has a key role to play in this. Huw Jones referred to the important work that is being done with schools. We will be ensuring that that whole sector is well to the fore in the action plan.

[130] **David Melding:** The point is that, at best, the action plan will be republished next year, which will be four years into the 'Climbing Higher' strategy. It appears that something as basic as physical education is not being systematically addressed.

[131] **Mr Jones:** It might not be in an action plan, but it is happening on the ground. We receive something like £5 million per annum from the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, which enables us to drive forward improvements on physical literacy. The money funds the physical education and school sport—PESS—programme, which is mentioned in the report and which we have rolled out across all schools in Wales. The programme is very much targeted at physical education and teacher continuing professional development and not only on extra-curricular elements such as Dragon Sport and 5x60.

[132] **Chris Franks:** I will move on to part 2 of the report, on co-ordination, which we have begun to touch on. What have you done to ensure that there is co-ordination both within the Assembly Government and with all the other bodies, such as councils and local health

boards? From my experience as a member of a local health board and county council, I know that, when it came to schools, the focus tended to be on results, funding, capital projects and youth work. If we tried to sell a school playing field, that created a lot of excitement, but I do not recall much discussion of physical activity in schools. The picture was similar for LHBs. What is being done to ensure that there is co-ordination with those important organisations, which are key to the debate?

[133] **Mr Brodie:** I think that we have covered the internal co-ordination in the Assembly Government. In terms of the co-ordination of delivery on the ground, we want to see the health, social care and wellbeing strategies and the strategies for children and young people doing justice to this whole agenda. The key mechanism for supporting those strategies with practical activity on the ground is the influence and discussion that we have through Huw Jones's side with the local authorities in developing the local authority partnership agreements, to which the report refers and which we are continuing to develop. As we said earlier, this is about getting local authorities to take a cross-departmental approach and to use their community leadership role to pull together the right style of approach. Perhaps Huw Jones will say a little bit more on how that is going.

[134] **Mr Jones:** I refer the committee to paragraph 2.13, where a very important statement is made. It states:

[135] ‘the barriers to effective cross-departmental working in local authorities should not be underestimated—as Sir Jeremy Beecham observed in his review of public services in Wales when he said that “leaders, organisers and departments ... are silo based. Vertical lines of policy and performance management reinforce this culture”’.

[136] That is the challenge that we are facing in rolling out the local authority partnership agreements. The first thing that we have to do is ensure that we have local authorities' support at the very highest level—leaders, chief executives, directors—otherwise there is no point in looking at the agreements as a process. There has to be commitment.

[137] I have been speaking to various cabinet committees and they have been very supportive of the concept. The next challenge is ensuring that activity happens as a result of that. We are trying to ensure that physical activity and sport appear in local authorities' statutory plans, whether in the statutory planning documents, the community plan, the young people's plan, or the health plan. We have to make sure that local authority officers reflect sport and physical activity in all those plans.

[138] We are seeing some very positive changes. We are also trying to make sure that the local authority partnership agreements have a reporting mechanism, so that we do not just get a report coming back. We want some mechanism whereby the local authority is taking responsibility for sport and physical activity. We cannot achieve that by ourselves, and the Assembly Government cannot achieve that by itself. The local authority should then have to produce a delivery plan as a result of the report.

[139] It is very early days, but 10 local authorities are already involved in the first tranche and, as I speak, we are rolling it out to the other 12. We are using chief officers from the first 10 to speak to the other 12 local authorities and tell them about their positive and negative experiences, and the challenges that they have faced in trying to effect the culture change in local authorities.

[140] **Dr Jewell:** The Welsh network of health schools has been going since 1999 and something like 80 per cent of schools have signed up to it. It includes encouraging physical activity, including travel to school as well as activity during the school day, and talks about the relationship between those and other factors such as smoking, drinking and food.

[141] You also asked about local health boards. The health, social care and wellbeing strategies are being looked at now. They were submitted in March and they cover the next three years. Physical activity is expected to be included in those strategies, so they are currently being analysed to see what they are saying about physical activity and what they are committing to doing. Part of that analysis will include how far physical activity is being addressed by local plans in every local authority and LHB across Wales. Also, as you know, the WLGA produced 'The route to health improvement', which has a section on encouraging physical activity.

[142] To some extent, mechanisms exist out there to achieve engagement. We just have to see how far they have got.

[143] **Chris Franks:** That is all very encouraging, but my concern is that, when it comes to the scale of priorities, it is very difficult to get investment into sports centres and to get them refurbished. So many of them were built in the 1970s or 1980s and they are showing their age. We also have huge problems with school buildings. Who is going to win? It is always going to be the school buildings, is it not?

[144] **Mr Jones:** Not necessarily. You are right that there are significant challenges out there. However, there is no doubt that, during the past 30 years, too many buildings were built, and they probably have too many different labels on them. We have a tendency to build a sports centre, a sports centre for a school, a library, a health centre, an old people's centre, and a young people's centre, all of which have to be maintained. Ninety-nine per cent of them are in the public sector and there is not the funding to maintain them. There is no doubt that there needs to be a reconfiguration of some of those buildings. We saw silly situations in the 1970s and 1980s where, instead of leisure centres being built on school sites, they were built half a mile further down the road because county and district councils had totally opposing views. Problems are now coming home to roost for us.

10.40 a.m.

[145] We have recently been working with local authorities on how we can reconfigure buildings. There is a massive building challenge but, over the next 10 years, we can consider how local authorities can save funding by closing facilities and building new facilities on school sites using the prudential codes, for example, to deliver them. If that difficult political nettle for local authority members is grasped, as it must be, that can make a difference.

[146] **Mr Evans:** I agree with everything that Huw Jones has said about facilities development. We are engaged in on-going discussions with a range of policy departments in the Assembly Government on the strategic capital investment fund. Our department is not in a position to make any bids at the moment, but we have already had positive discussions with health, education, transport and economic regeneration colleagues, including colleagues involved in the Heads of the Valleys programme, on how their projects might be configured to include community-based sport and leisure facilities as part of the physical activity agenda. That is one way in which we can address the issue in the short to medium term.

[147] **Lesley Griffiths:** I have a question for Dr Jewell. The report states that local health, social care and wellbeing strategies have mentioned physical activity but not given it a high priority. Obviously, those strategies represent local partners' main plans for dealing with local health issues. Has a change occurred in the year since the report was published? Is physical activity now given the priority that it should be given?

[148] **Dr Jewell:** We will see about that. Greater emphasis was placed on physical activity when guidance was issued last autumn on the development of strategies by local partnerships.

Obviously, we send out guidance, but it is fairly high level. It is then up to local partnerships, through the leadership of local authorities and local health boards in particular, to work locally to develop their own priorities. They have now submitted their priorities, and we are analysing them. As a result, we will be able to tell the extent to which physical activity has a higher and stronger profile than it had previously.

[149] Obviously, we see the relationship between food and fitness, which is covered in one of our strategic objectives. I hope that both food and fitness will be priorities, but we will certainly consider whether physical activity is a stronger priority.

[150] Physical activity is, as I said earlier, the best buy for public health to some extent. Fitness and leisure centres do not have to be built; people could be encouraged to walk or cycle to school instead of being taken to school by car, for example.

[151] We will be able to tell the committee quite soon about what people's priorities are. Work is being progressed, and the matrix of evaluation includes assessment of how far physical activity has been explicitly mentioned in plans.

[152] **Lesley Griffiths:** Perhaps Huw Jones could expand on the answer that he gave to Chris Franks. He mentioned that he speaks to local authority chief executives, cabinet members and committees. Is that engagement with local authorities making them more aware that they must fully support the physical activity agenda?

[153] **Mr Jones:** I think that it is. To be fair to local authority members, a great deal of persuasion has not been needed. People grasp the nettle once they are presented with the simple facts about coronary heart disease rates in Wales, for example, and are told that we all have a responsibility to do something about such things.

[154] The report highlights the challenge of ensuring that information permeates through all local authority departments. People's initial tendency is to say, 'Let's turn to our leisure colleagues and ask them what they are going to do.' I have had to point out that the problem of increasing physical activity is not a sport and leisure problem; rather, it is a whole authority challenge. We need to get people on board who are involved in planning, transport, education and the countryside, and ensure that we get improved links with other local bodies, whether they are voluntary sector bodies or statutory agencies such as local health boards. That will not happen overnight; it will take some time. However, we are seeing significant progress by some authorities.

[155] **Lesley Griffiths:** My next question is for Huw Brodie and returns to the 'Climbing Higher' initiative. The report is critical of the fact that there is no action plan. Mr Brodie mentioned that one will be put in place later this year, but why has it taken so long to put it in place?

[156] **Mr Brodie:** After 'Climbing Higher' was produced, there was 'Climbing Higher—next steps'. To some extent, it is difficult for me to comment on the past; I have been explaining the steps that we will take from here on. If there is one message that we should take from the Auditor General's report, it is that the foundations must be laid thoroughly to make progress in this difficult area. If we are asked why we did not rush out an action plan quickly once the report was produced, my answer is that we have a lot of spadework to do to get it right. We must work on all the evaluation indicators, work across departments and ensure that we come out with an action plan that has the degree of senior-level buy-in from all the external partners that will be essential if it is to make any difference.

[157] **Janice Gregory:** I will move on to the thorny issue of funding. You may know that the Communities and Culture Committee, which I chair, has just concluded an inquiry into

voluntary sector funding. One of the themes that came through early on from all the witnesses for that inquiry was the fact that short-term funding does not benefit long-term plans. The ‘Climbing Higher’ strategy is an ambitious 20-year plan, so short-term funding will not assist it. Indeed, the Auditor General recommends in his report:

[158] ‘The Assembly Government and its delivery partners, should carry out a detailed assessment of its funding strategy for supporting physical activity and delivering ‘Climbing Higher’ targets; allowing for the flexibility to enable recipients to adapt projects to their local needs and encourage greater innovation.’

[159] What progress have you made against that recommendation?

[160] **Mr Brodie:** We are working on those funding issues as part of the approach that I have outlined. The local authority partnership agreements are within the spirit of that recommendation; they allow local authorities the flexibility to develop and deliver local solutions that are linked to needs. That is the heart of the approach that we are trying to take.

[161] **Mr Jones:** One of the fundamental difficulties and challenges concerns public sector funding in general. The Sports Council of Wales’s funding is for one year and we have two-year planning figures. However, I would not want to use that as an excuse for not having longer-term funding, because the council has existed for more than 30 years and I am not aware of any plans to change that.

[162] I will give a number of examples. The funding that we give the voluntary sector, particularly the sports governing bodies, is long term. We ask them to prepare at least four-year plans. We fund those that are able to prepare and deliver on such plans and we monitor their progress. The local authority partnership agreements are also long term. The current components of those—the Dragon Sport initiatives, the Disability Sport Wales national development programme and the 5x60 project—have all been running for five or six years. We have some stability in those, which is why we have been able to make the progress in those areas that I mentioned early in the meeting.

10.50 a.m.

[163] **Janice Gregory:** I would like to discuss further with Huw Brodie the integrated action plan that comes with ‘Climbing Higher—next steps’. Will any long-term funding be coming along with that action plan so as to provide long-term security?

[164] **Mr Brodie:** That is something that we will be discussing with our finance colleagues.

[165] **Janice Gregory:** A short and concise answer.

[166] **Huw Lewis:** I wish to focus on paragraphs 2.28 to 2.33 of ‘Increasing physical activity’. To sum up, the message is that partnership working, which is absolutely essential for the roll-out of such strategies, is very patchy. Paragraph 2.33 states:

[167] ‘We found little evidence of regional approaches such as sharing facilities and resources’.

[168] I am interested in focusing on that problem. What progress can you report on how we can smooth out that patchiness?

[169] Do you not think that there is a fundamental flaw with how the Assembly Government attempts to roll out policies? There might be examples of best practice at the interface between a national, all-Wales policy such as this one and local government

priorities, but there are also examples of everything going completely pear-shaped. The Assembly Government is attempting to formulate strategic policy, but there is a lack of clarity around the role of local government. Is it the role of local authorities to implement and integrate the policy tactically as part of their work? The answer is no, because they will have strategies of their own that can cut across the national policy completely. In that case, what do we do? Authorities might simply choose to ignore the national policy, or they might develop capacity problems during implementation.

[170] How are we going to move things through? I understand that it is a theoretical question, but this policy is a prime illustration of the 'Climbing Higher' strategy. Can we sustain such a national policy and make it work while relying on a persuasive relationship with local authorities? Does experience not show that, although we are very good at producing strategy documents, we are very bad at implementing them?

[171] **Mr Brodie:** Everything that we have been saying today underlines our clear view of the role of local authorities. We want them to have a strategic role at local level in terms of their community leadership. We want them to have the flexibility to tailor solutions to local needs. I would have thought that that was directly in line with the sort of relationship that local authorities would want to have with the Assembly Government. I do not think that there is a philosophical or conceptual problem; there is just a lot of hard slog to be done. As you can see from the examples that he has given, Huw Jones and the sports council are working to achieve the necessary strategic-level buy-in from local authorities to put the strategy into practice.

[172] We all know from the range of work that local authorities are engaged in that we cannot get things to happen in a joined-up way overnight, even once we have won the hearts and minds of the people at the top, which is where the crux of the matter lies.

[173] I do not think that the strategy requires regional structures in local government to take it forward. There are certain areas of policy that do fall into that category—for example, transport—but this strategy is very much one for individual local authority areas.

[174] **Huw Lewis:** Your final point worries me. I know many communities, including mine, where travel to places of leisure or physical activity is an issue. People have problems with public transport that demand a regional response. We were speaking earlier about the outdoor environment, which, by its very nature, ignores local government boundaries. For that reason, we have set up organisations such as Môn a Menai and the Heads of the Valleys initiative to try to overcome such boundary issues among local authorities. That is why I am a little uneasy about what you are saying.

[175] To go back to my original point, would it not be a great deal quicker and more efficient if we simply put the key strategic policies on a statutory basis? Why is Huw Brodie spending all his time proselytising when he could just be implementing?

[176] **Mr Brodie:** I do not think that creating statutory obligations would change anything. A statutory obligation can get a local authority to produce a plan, but what really matters is the quality of the plan and the quality of the implementation. As I have said, that is where the hard slog is. Statutory plans exist in a variety of areas for local government, but you would not see a stark contrast if you compared the progress in those areas with the progress in the area that we are discussing. I do not think that statutory obligations are a panacea.

[177] **Mr Jones:** I would like to give some practical examples of the challenges that we face, which relate to the balance between the universal provision and the local delivery of initiatives such as Dragon Sport, 5x60 and the physical education and school sport programme—each of which is mentioned in the report. We face such challenges every day of

the week. There are significant benefits to having national programmes, but the key—as paragraph 2.25 points out—is to have local flexibility in dealing with issues and in combining and making the best use of resources.

[178] In all our discussions with local authorities, the three major initiatives that I mentioned have been whole-heartedly welcomed—100 per cent. Through the local authority partnership agreements, we are offering more flexibility. For example, if people in Merthyr decided that they did not necessarily want a PE and school sport co-ordinator and a Dragon Sport co-ordinator as well as a 5x60 co-ordinator, they would be allowed to use their resources in the way they thought best, as long as they could show us that they were achieving the specific outputs and outcomes that they had agreed to achieve.

[179] We are moving towards having a very different mechanism for monitoring many of the initiatives. Rather than considering an input basis and an output basis, we are considering outputs and outcomes, as the report highlights.

[180] **Huw Lewis:** The Assembly is responsible for the implementation of the policy—Ministers and their departments are responsible. However, an extraordinary degree of trust is being extended to local government to deliver the policy. The responsibility and the roll-out reside in different places. How can that work?

[181] **Mr Brodie:** Local government is, ipso facto, in charge of delivery. We are not out there on the ground. To go back to your earlier example, we do not know which voluntary organisations in which communities are strong and have credibility. The Assembly Government cannot do that work. Local authorities are democratically elected bodies with a remit to provide community leadership. We have to work in a genuine partnership with local authorities to get them to fulfil their role. I cannot see how the Assembly Government could easily and effectively take over the delivery of such policies; an enormous governmental structure would be required.

[182] **Huw Lewis:** I was not suggesting that.

[183] **Mr Brodie:** The point that you made about putting policies on a statutory basis is arguable one way or the other, but—although it might sound easy to create that sort of obligation—I am not sure that it would automatically provide the right answer in practice.

11.00 a.m.

[184] **David Melding:** It could be argued that your main partners are local authorities and local health boards, but we have heard in this morning's evidence session that, against most international best practice, the health department is not leading the strategy. There is no co-ordinating champion, and you said clearly that you do not think that it is necessary to have one. We accept that that is your view. We have heard repeatedly that there is no baseline information—there have been lots of discursive answers about how you are trying to develop that—and we still do not have an action plan. How on earth do our local partners know what to do?

[185] **Mr Brodie:** With respect, that is not quite right. First, unusually, I will correct something that you said. I did not say that it is unnecessary to have a single person. I said that we are still reflecting on that issue.

[186] We have a clear vision of what we want local authorities to do and we are communicating that to them. We are doing the hard slog of trying to win over their hearts and minds to the reality of that. As Tony Jewell said, we are scrutinising the health, social care and wellbeing strategies. I am not sure that there are any simple short cuts.

[187] On the point about the health department, many different departments have key links. As we heard, the issue is not just about leisure centres. It is as much about travel to work. If we make the argument in a different way and consider other departments, responsibilities for transport are as central to the matter as anything else.

[188] Health is the ultimate policy end user. One of the key objectives is improved health, and the health department is recognised in our structures as the end user through its role in pulling everything together in the public health strategic framework. However, there is a distinction to be drawn between the health department's role as the policy customer and the actual delivery mechanisms, which necessarily involve a range of departments. As Huw Jones underlined, the Sports Council's role is far broader than its title suggests.

[189] **David Melding:** Eleanor Burnham has a question on local authorities and central strategies.

[190] **Eleanor Burnham:** I feel that we have been waffling around the issue. Local authorities battle constantly with lots of issues. We heard your point of view, but local authorities face difficulties because many of the leisure facilities on which everything was premised have come to the end of their useful lives. Local authorities need some leadership and inspiration from you guys, because you are, at the moment, in key positions to stimulate all the activity, get the focus, and get the money to where it is needed. You have a leading role.

[191] **David Melding:** That takes us nicely into the next territory. I ask Janice Gregory to put the question.

[192] **Janice Gregory:** Challenging people's existing practice is incredibly difficult, especially if they are like me and think that charging around the Assembly's corridors is their physical activity for the day or week. If we are honest, most of us would say that.

[193] Changing practice is difficult for everyone, including the sports council and local health boards. There is a quote in the report that caught my eye more than anything else. It is not attributed to Huw Jones personally, but it comes from the sports council. I quote:

[194] 'If we keep on doing what we have always done, we will always get what we always got.'

[195] Huw Jones mentioned that when he gave evidence to the Communities and Culture Committee.

[196] We understand that it is difficult to change practice. In many constituencies in Wales, people still expect to have the sports centre on the corner or the swimming pool in the village. I return to a point that was made earlier. In years gone by, that was true, because the county council provided one and the borough council might have provided another. I am not disturbed, but I am slightly concerned that we are closing those buildings.

[197] I would like to know from the witnesses—anyone who wants to jump in should feel free—first, what the Welsh Assembly Government and the Sports Council of Wales are doing differently so that we do not always get what we have always got. Secondly, albeit that existing facilities need refurbishment or are coming to the end of their useful life, are they being used innovatively, so that people like me are attracted to them? We understand, as I have said, that people just want the built facilities and that the great outdoors is maybe not part of their psyche.

[198] **Mr Jones:** I will take the issue of facility provision first. I have talked about the realignment and the need for reconfiguration in relation to those facilities, so I will not say anything more on that. The figures for the proportion of people who do certain activities show that only about 13 per cent of the population actually use our leisure centres, so the provision of additional leisure centres will not be the mechanism by which we achieve the 5x30 target. The centres certainly need to be upgraded and reconfigured for those who are already committed—who are achieving the 5x30 target—but that is not the root of the issue. In considering how we are going to achieve the target, we have to develop a massive culture change.

[199] The very north of Europe—such as Scandinavia, for example—has the highest levels of participation; followed by central Europe, which includes the UK along with Germany and France; and there are lower levels in the Mediterranean countries. That is broadly accurate. However, what is different in places such as Scandinavia is the culture of sport and physical activity. An individual there who is not a member of a sports club or engaged in outdoor activities is almost considered not to be a fit and proper citizen; there is something wrong with that individual. That is the culture in those countries: young people are brought up in the context of membership of local clubs. We are trying to find out whether we can develop that culture here. That can be done only at a very local level—it cannot be done nationally. If we consider that as a local issue, how can we manage facilities differently? How can we get the voluntary sector much more engaged in running and planning the use of some of our public facilities? That is what occurs in Scandinavia and Germany. We have an idea of public sector provision with regard to who will do what and at what times, rather than letting the voluntary sector run that.

[200] Doorstep activities are key in trying to get people out of their homes. We have a very small scheme, which was set up on the back of the regeneration initiatives, that involves community champions who work with people at a very local level, particularly in deprived communities, to say, ‘Hey, how can we get you involved? What do you want to do? How can we help and support you?’ They find out what advice and guidance people need. I think that that will bear some fruit.

[201] One of the keys is not so much facilities; it is people. We need to train people much more than we do at the moment. I ask you to think about an individual in your family who does not achieve the 5x30 target and who is sedentary. How would you get that person to meet the 5x30 target? You will have some influence over that person because you know and love them, and you could cajole or threaten them, but it is very difficult. If we take a step back and think about how to do that with people whom we do not know and superimpose that on people who have all the barriers of social deprivation against them, it appears to be a very difficult challenge. We need to grab hold of the education and training issue, and train coaches, leaders, teachers and people who work in the voluntary sector much better, and drive that forward through a much broader adult education strategy. That is the way forward and we are grappling with that big challenge. We are considering not just the technical skills, but the softer skills that people need. In sport, we are very good at technical skills—forehand smashes and drop goals—but we are not very good at finding out what someone who comes into a leisure centre wants and how we can ensure that they come back the following week.

11.10 a.m.

[202] **David Melding:** Do you want to follow up on that, Janice? The tyranny of the clock is starting to apply, but I want us to draw out all relevant evidence.

[203] **Janice Gregory:** I agree with Mr Jones about voluntary sector use of public sector facilities but, although that sounds very good, in practice it is not happening on the ground. It might not be appropriate to raise the issue here, but as you have mentioned it, what influence

can be brought to bear by the Welsh Assembly Government on the Welsh Local Government Association or local authorities?

[204] Someone said that we have to grasp the nettle and they were right. It is such a basic issue. We have public sector facilities that many people cannot access, perhaps because they cannot afford to, even though there are some wonderful schemes to help people. There are leisure centres that are closed when mini-rugby and mini-football teams are desperate for facilities in which to train. What can the Welsh Assembly Government do to persuade local authorities to ensure that they allow their public sector facilities to be used in that rather innovative way? I invite Huw Brodie to expand on that.

[205] **Mr Brodie:** We can certainly reflect on that, but I underline Huw Jones's point that we must not keep on thinking that leisure centres are the key to resolving the problem. We need to structure exercise into people's lives. If people are busy, it is difficult to persuade them to find the time to go to the leisure centre, never mind to start taking exercise. The key thing is that instead of driving a third of a mile to the local shops, people walk there and back.

[206] **Janice Gregory:** But often—

[207] **David Melding:** Dr Jewell has been trying to get in for a while, and I am keen that he gets the opportunity to do so.

[208] **Dr Jewell:** I have two points. First, what is the big and simple message that we have been trying to promulgate through the campaigns of Health Challenge Wales? Health Challenge Wales does not act only for the Welsh Assembly Government; it acts for all individuals and organisations in Wales. We need to do more work to ensure that everyone feels that they are part of Health Challenge Wales.

[209] Let us consider the four top priorities. If someone does not smoke, drinks within the recommended limits for alcohol consumption, does the recommended level of physical activity and has five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, they will live 10 years longer than someone who gets a negative score in each of those areas. That is the high-level message that Health Challenge Wales has promulgated in the early part of the year. We emphasised the importance of not smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol within the recommended limits, engaging in physical activity and having five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. We know from the evidence that taking all those steps makes a difference of 10 years to someone's life expectancy. Taking even one of those steps will produce benefits. That is the high-level message that the public health strategic framework will transmit, which will be reinforced time and again by vehicles such as Health Challenge Wales. Instead of complicating things by discussing particular fatty acids, we should concentrate on the big, high-level messages.

[210] Secondly, when we deliver a health promotion strategy, a useful tool is to consider the setting that we are talking about. That setting could be the home, the workplace, a school or an educational establishment. We could just be talking about the general community. We need to have plans that speak to the workplace—we already have the corporate health standard. I have spoken about healthy schools. As has been said, we also need to enable people to do everyday activities in the community.

[211] I hope that the public health strategic framework will employ such delivery mechanisms. We should keep the top-level messages simple and use appropriate delivery mechanisms in each key setting. Given that we spend a huge amount of our time in work, the workplace is a key setting. Older people and children, in particular, spend a huge amount of time at home, so home is an important environment—that relates to all the remote control stuff that I was talking about. What can the local authority do to help through community

enablement? That is the sort of strategic approach that we will take.

[212] **Irene James:** My question relates to paragraphs 3.6 to 3.10 of 'Increasing physical activity'. I know that we have said a lot already about the flaws in 'Climbing Higher', but I will ask about the flaws in the targets for physical activity, particularly the ambiguity in the first target, which is, as has been said, the 5x30 standard. 'Climbing Higher' targets seem to have been set without any thought towards the baseline. If we are going to measure or evaluate anything, do we not need to have a baseline? Why was that done?

[213] **Mr Brodie:** It is difficult for me to comment on something that took place four years ago. I have said already that we have got together a research evaluation group, which includes senior-level representation from the office of our chief social research officer. The group is giving us the appropriate input on how we can set baselines and evaluate progress. In the light of that, as part of working up the action plan, we are reviewing the targets and considering how appropriate some of them are. As the report makes clear, it is intrinsically difficult to set baselines for some of them and to measure progress.

[214] **Irene James:** So you do not envisage a full baseline being set, even in the action plan, for all the targets.

[215] **Mr Brodie:** We will have to review the appropriateness of some of the targets in the light of how easy it is to set and evaluate baselines.

[216] **Chris Franks:** I will address case study 9, on the free swimming initiative. Quite a few interesting comments are made in the report about the evaluation of the initiative. Can you comment on that?

[217] **Mr Brodie:** An evaluation is being published on the free swimming initiative. There are some notable successes. For example, more than half of 10 to 14-year-olds have participated in free swimming lessons and the number of children and young people participating has gone up from 24,000 in 2004-05 to 71,000 in 2006-07. There has also been quite an impact in Communities First areas, and there is evidence of older people increasing the frequency with which they swim. We are still learning lessons and are working on the free swimming programme to ensure that local authorities weave it into a coherent local approach to developing physical activity, but overall a lot of positives have come out of the initiative.

[218] **David Melding:** I think that Bethan Jenkins might have some issues on the free swimming initiative.

[219] **Bethan Jenkins:** As a former lifeguard, I am very interested in the initiative. It is good that there is a free swimming initiative, but is it the best way to encourage people to take part in physical activity, or are there other ways in which we could encourage people to take part in some activities? What will you do about the recommendations in the Auditor General's report on setting national targets for participation in free swimming initiatives against the scheme's key objectives and the recommendation that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Sports Council should evaluate whether the scheme has delivered value for money? Those elements of the report clearly outline failings in the initiative.

[220] **Mr Brodie:** The sports council is taking the report's recommendations into account in its work with local authorities. We will have to reflect on national targets with Ministers. There is a slight tension, if I may say so, in what the report says. In some areas, you say that we need to give greater scope for local flexibility to tailor solutions that make sense for the local community. If we followed that approach, we would need to weigh up how far that fitted with our setting more directive central targets. We will need to reflect on that issue as we work up the action plan.

11.20 a.m.

[221] **David Melding:** I should point out that we are not saying anything yet. Our report will follow the evidence session.

[222] **Bethan Jenkins:** Case study 9 shows that local authorities are still not meeting the minimum requirements of providing free swimming. The coverage is patchy. I know that in Neath Port Talbot, which I represent, free swimming is provided at hours of the day when it is not possible for people to go. I understand the comment about providing both national targets and local control, but there has to be some accountability, as we have talked about for the five-times-a-week activity levels.

[223] **Mr Brodie:** Indeed, and we are working on that with local authorities through the sports council to ensure that they deliver effectively. A lot of positives have come out so far from that work.

[224] **Mr Jones:** On positives, we have an evaluation document that is hot off the press, copies of which I would be more than happy to provide for committee members. It has become available literally just this week, and it is the formal evaluation of the scheme. We also have a report from the Welsh local government data unit. Following our taking over the evaluation and some of the points in the WAO report, we commissioned the unit to look at getting an improved data set. The unit has worked closely with our local authority partners to do that, and we therefore have a comprehensive report that illustrates and provides data on what has been happening and where.

[225] One interesting point comes out of the evaluation and builds on the point that Huw Brodie just made. Ministers need to examine how free swimming is viewed as we continue to make progress with it. Is it viewed as a stand-alone scheme or a developmental initiative alongside many of the others that we have in place? That takes us back to the question that Huw Lewis asked about the tensions between national policy and local delivery. The report concludes that swimming has significant benefits, and it highlights the considerable numbers who have taken it up through both the young and old people schemes.

[226] However, swimming obviously is limiting. Only certain groups of individuals are attracted to it; others are not attracted to it, particularly the older people's scheme. Some of the case studies that are highlighted in the evaluation report are good examples of where local authorities have used a degree of flexibility, their own initiative and sometimes their own funding to link the free swimming initiative with dry-side activities. They have done that to encourage young people to come along—particularly teenage girls—and to try to create situations that are far more attractive to them than just a free splash initiative.

[227] We have also seen changes over the period of the free swimming initiative so that there are more structured initiatives, because local authorities have wanted to see more development and sustainability. Rather than saying to people, 'The door's open. Come in, splash around and then go home,' authorities have asked themselves how they can ensure that young people can swim in the first place, because certain groups in society cannot. They have also asked themselves how to link people into clubs, so that they continue to participate instead of just having a splash on particular occasions.

[228] **David Melding:** I am sure that we are all pleased that the scheme has now been evaluated.

[229] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, I am thrilled, because that answers the question that I kept asking the previous Minister. It is all very well to get somebody to jump in a pool, but what

happens if they are irritating and get in everybody's way or—more important—if they are unable to swim and free swimming lessons are not co-ordinated in the free swimming initiative?

[230] The other overriding issue was about people being able to get to swimming pools. When I asked about that, many people in Gwynedd said that they could not participate because of transport difficulties. However, I am very pleased, and I look forward to reading those two comprehensive documents.

[231] **David Melding:** I am sure that those issues are addressed. If not, you can follow them up.

[232] I have a couple of final broad points. We have heard a lot about the action plan that is being developed and the difficulties with data relating to the 11 core targets. The Auditor General has identified a need for a more robust system. I would like to know what progress has been made on the future evaluation and monitoring of 'Climbing Higher'.

[233] **Mr Brodie:** As I said, our expert group has specialist input from the office of the chief social research officer. We are going through all the targets. If you want, we can get back to you with a more detailed note on where we are on each target.

[234] **David Melding:** I was hoping to get a slightly more commanding answer. 'Climbing Higher' is a long-term strategy that talks about huge cultural and behavioural changes. However, I presume that we must say more than simply that we want to emulate Scandinavian practice over a 20-year period. We need to evaluate progress and consider whether we are going in the right direction. Surely evaluation and monitoring are key, especially with a long-term strategy.

[235] **Mr Brodie:** I agree totally, which is why they are such a key part of the work that we are doing. I am not sure what you want me to say.

[236] **David Melding:** It is not for me to feed the witnesses.

[237] **Dr Jewell:** There are two kinds of information and data. In Wales, we are strong on population-wide survey data. They do not address the issue that you raised about specific targets, but they have given us a good baseline, as was commented on earlier. The information goes back to 1986 for the school-age survey, and we have international comparators, so we can see where we are positioned in relation to Scandinavia or Canada. Wales is well placed on public health population surveys, because they have been produced consistently over time. We have information on adults through the Welsh health survey and on children through the healthy school behaviour survey. Those surveys use rigorous methodologies and we get a population measure.

[238] However, that does not address the issue that David Melding raises about information on how far on we are in Wales—by local government area or whatever—towards delivering the 'Climbing Higher' targets. I just want to make the distinction between the public health population data, which are good and sound, and the issue about more specific targets, notwithstanding the issue about the public health surveys being self-reported rather than directly measured.

[239] **David Melding:** I want to take the issue a stage further. This is a slightly technical point, so I hope that I have grasped it. We rely on the Welsh Assembly Government's Welsh health survey, with which I am familiar, but the sports council's survey has so far also fed into the monitoring of targets. How well do those two surveys marry? Are we measuring the same things and are we clear about the targets?

[240] **Mr Brodie:** One of the early conclusions that the group came to is that we should focus on the Welsh health survey as our key tracker of progress.

[241] **David Melding:** That is very clear.

[242] That takes us to the end of the evidence session. I thank all the witnesses for taking part in what turned out to be a fairly long session. That indicates the interest in the policy area. I am grateful for your attendance and your answering our questions. A transcript will be sent to you, and if, in your view, there are any errors in the transcription, you will be able to feed them through for the Record of Proceedings to consider. After that long session, I thank the witnesses again and invite them to leave the table.

11.30 a.m.

[243] Consideration of the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Audit Committee report 'The 2006-07 Consolidated Resource Accounts of the National Assembly for Wales'

[244] **David Melding:** We have one more agenda item in public session, which is consideration of the Welsh Assembly Government's response to our report 'The 2006-07 Consolidated Resource Accounts of the National Assembly for Wales'. We have had a letter from Rhodri Morgan and advice from Jeremy Colman. Do you have anything to add, Jeremy?

[245] **Mr Colman:** The only point that I will make is that the report was one of the more critical ones that the committee has produced and it is therefore particularly encouraging that all the recommendations have been accepted. I have a slight concern, which I hope comes over in my letter, that the Welsh Assembly Government has confused two slightly different points. The committee recommended that the Government should take into account staff time when planning and monitoring projects. However, the Government says that it does not get all staff to fill in timesheets. Those are different issues. I am sure that there are good reasons why not all staff fill in timesheets, but that does not mean that staff costs can be ignored. We will continue to make that point to Welsh Assembly Government officials. However, the response is positive.

[246] **David Melding:** That is pleasing.

11.31 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[247] **David Melding:** I propose that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).

[248] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.31 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.31 a.m.*