

**VOCAL CONFERENCE 2007: “SPORT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES:
LEAVING A LEGACY”**

SPEAKING NOTES

Speaking time (5-10 minutes)

Good morning. Many thanks to VOCAL for the invitation to be here today. I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to so many of you responsible for developing and delivering sport to local communities across Scotland.

This Government is committed to ‘Leaving a legacy’ – the theme of your conference and let me assure you I am personally committed to securing a sporting legacy for future generations.

We are emerging from a period of change nationally and locally within government and have a unique opportunity to ensure that value of sport is high on new and emerging

policy agenda. We must ensure that sport is at the heart of community development; and that sport becomes integral to the life of the nation. And by this I mean active participation not simply following a favoured sport on television. I know you share our ambition and that you too are committed to sport so we must work together to ensure that sport is valued for what it can bring to communities as well as individuals

As a new Government, we have demonstrated progress on a number of fronts in our first 100 days. I believe our High Performance Sport Summit on 23 August clearly demonstrated that sport is high on our agenda. And not just elite sport. Let me be clear that I also want to see progress at grassroots level.

We are keen to work with local authorities and sports governing bodies in building a fresh approach to securing the national outcomes for sport set out in Reaching Higher. But it is for you to determine how these outcomes will be achieved locally.

The case for sport

We are all alive to how sport can make a significant contribution across society and without doubt contributes to our objective of Scotland as a nation which is— ‘wealthier and fairer’, ‘healthier’, ‘smarter’, ‘safer and stronger’, and ‘greener’. This contribution should be mirrored at the local level with potential of sport fully recognised in community plans.

The sport strategy - ‘*Reaching Higher*’ – clearly sets out the arguments for investing in sport. Perhaps for the first

time we have a clear definition of our respective roles and responsibilities and roadmap to follow. It's a challenge but one which we must embark upon together, with respect for our separate yet co-terminus ambitions. I am aware that my officials are in the process of engaging with you about the implementation of the strategy and I undertake to give careful consideration to the issues which emerge from this series of meetings with a view to providing, wherever possible the national direction required.

Facilities

I am aware that local authorities face many challenges and none more so than in meeting their statutory duty to provide adequate provision of sporting facilities for their residents.

The audit report of local sports facilities highlighted that significant investment is required to refurbish, replace and maintain local facilities. I too am concerned about the lack of quality community facilities that are readily accessible at times when the public want them at a cost that doesn't put people off.

I would encourage local authorities to take a more strategic approach to facilities. You need to look at a range of issues such as the benefits of multi-sports facilities which can meet the changing profile of participation in sport and in making use of the school estate.

I recognise that there are certain restrictions and frustrations in opening up access to the school estate.

Significant investment is being made in the school estate and it's important that we maximise the benefit; not only in terms of access but also in the cost to the user. I hear of

many cases where local communities are rightly proud of the new sports facilities provided at their schools but at times can only look through barred gates or can't access them due to cost.

The Scottish Government is committed to working with you in finding a solution to this problem.

We are currently considering what additional investment can be made in sports facilities as part of the Spending Review and through demonstrating to other portfolio Ministers how investment in sport can help them meet their objectives.

Well-trained people

As well as looking to improve facilities, we also need to recruit, train and retain our sporting workforce. We need the coaches and the many volunteers who give their time, and without whom, sport simply could not happen.

We need a workforce that is motivated, well-trained, well-supported and above all valued. The need to expand opportunities into all communities represents a significant challenge in sourcing coaches and securing volunteers.

Difficult, yes but not impossible and I have been greatly impressed to hear of the innovative approaches developed in some authorities to secure commitment and provide training and support to underpin new community developments.

It is also important for you to work in close partnership with sports governing bodies; the private sector; as well as each other to address participation issues, to develop player pathways and to ensure that proportionate approaches are adopted. I appreciate that every community wants a new facility or opportunity but it cannot be wise or a good use of public money for councils to make provision either side of the local boundary.

The development of community sports clubs is crucial. I encourage efforts to support clubs in taking an innovative, and if necessary non-traditional approaches to increasing participation. But clubs also need to be encouraged to be flexible about the use of their facilities and in working with others to provide multi-sport opportunities. This is challenging for all involved and may include rationalisation of facilities which is never easy. This is challenging for club members and labour intensive for sports development staff. However, trends in participation are changing and people are interested in different sports and trying a range of opportunities. By working together, clubs will secure their future and attract more participants .

Strong community clubs are vital if we are to ensure that young people commit to sport.

Active Schools has clearly demonstrated that young people can be encouraged to engage with a range of sports and their interest and commitment developed.

Active Schools is stimulating interest but clubs are essential to ensuring their long-term commitment. I know that sportscotland is working closely with Active School Managers and Co-ordinators to address this challenge. But where no clubs exist within a community then it is too easy for young people's interest to stray. The excellent work being undertaken by Active School co-ordinators must link into local sports development and community capacity building.

Active Schools represents a significant investment by Government to increase sport and physical activity amongst young people and we are committed to its continuation and further development particularly within secondary schools.

Sport in the Community

My ambition is for healthy, active, well- motivated and inclusive communities. Sport can play a key role in achieving this vision. The challenge is to get everyone involved in the community planning process to recognise this.

Strategically, sport can also make a significant contribution to a range of themes under the Community Plan, it is important that this is recognised by local authority staff across the range of departments as well as Health Boards and other partners. The need to ensure colleagues understand and commit to the potential of sport has never been more vital. With tight budgets and competing demands for expenditure it is incumbent on us all to expound the value of sport. Clearly many authorities have successfully made this case and are greatly persuaded of the value of sport. In 2005-06 an

average of £83 per head of population was spent on sport and sport related services. However, there are significant variations across the country ranging from £36 to £136 per head of population. I am concerned about this variation and the impact on communities.

There must be lessons that can be learned from those authorities which have successfully secured a higher share of the budget for sport. Events such as this conference afford an excellent opportunity to share good practice and to learn from each other.

From a national perspective the Scottish Government is developing plans to support authorities in the sharing of good practice through the development of a system of Quality Improvement for use by local authorities.

This system will be used to inform policy and decision making nationally and locally and aims to drive up standards in sports provision across Scotland. It is in the

early stages of development but I can assure you that it will be based on a process of self evaluation.

Conclusion

Without doubt, local authorities play a crucial role in the delivery and development of sport in Scotland.

Significant resources already exist in the system but I am aware that there are specific pressures particularly in relation to community sport and facilities. I am looking at ways in which these areas can receive additional support as part of the Spending Review but it is a tough round and I am afraid I can give no assurances at this stage.

We are committed to sport in Scotland and securing a firm and lasting legacy for the future. If, as we expect, we are awarded the 2014 Commonwealth Games we will have

an opportunity to showcase Scotland on the international stage, to increase Scotland's sporting prowess and most importantly demonstrate our lasting legacy for sport.

I look forward to my role in providing the strategic leadership required for sport. I encourage you to work with me, sportscotland, sports governing bodies and each other in strengthening our sporting infrastructure and developing further Scotland's sporting heritage.