



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau a Diwylliant
The Communities and Culture Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 14 Ionawr 2010
Thursday, 14 January 2010**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi 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'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
David Lloyd	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Sandy Mewies	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Mike Leatt	Prif Swyddog Gweithredol, Undeb Hoci Cymru Chief Executive Officer Welsh Hockey Union
Eddie O'Neill	Swyddog Gweithredol, Welsh Badminton Cymru Executive Officer, Welsh Badminton Cymru

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.29 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.29 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Mr Jackson:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I call the meeting to order. As you will be aware, since the committee's last meeting, Sandy Mewies, Alun Davies and Mohammad Asghar have joined the Communities and Culture Committee, taking over from Janice Gregory, former Chair of the committee, Lesley Griffiths and Alun Cairns. This creates a vacancy for the position of Chair of the Communities and Culture Committee.

[2] Under Standing Order No. 10.18, a committee must elect a Chair, so are there any nominations for Chair?

[3] **Joyce Watson:** I would like to nominate Sandy Mewies.

[4] **Mr Jackson:** Do we have any other nominations? I see that there are no other nominations, therefore, on that basis, I declare Sandy Mewies duly elected.

[5] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you—it was with unanimous support obviously. [*Laughter.*] I

know that not all members are here, as some are still in other committees. However, I will start quickly given that there are issues with the weather, and there are issues with the weather for people who may wish to move on from here.

[6] Thank you very much for electing me Chair. Janice Gregory did not have the opportunity, as I did at this week's meeting of the Committee on European and External Affairs, to thank Members, therefore she has asked me to thank you for your enormous support and work during her time as Chair, and to thank the administrative staff, the clerks, the Members' Research Service, and everyone else who has been involved. Janice particularly asked me to do that.

[7] From a personal point of view, I would like to pay tribute to Janice's work in developing this committee, which, I suppose, grew out of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, of which I used to be a member. It sort of mothered this committee, so it is quite interesting to see how the Communities and Culture Committee has been developed.

[8] I welcome Members and guests, and anyone who is in the public gallery, and I wish everyone a happy new year. You all know by now that we operate bilingually, and translation equipment is available. Someone will show you how to use it if you are unsure, but it is quite simple. The translation is available on channel 1, and amplification of sound can be heard on channel 0. I ask everyone to switch off any mobile phones, BlackBerrys or any other electronic devices that they have with them, because they interfere with the broadcasting system. I have not been notified of any fire drills, so if the alarm does go off, the ushers will lead us out.

[9] Do Members have any relevant declarations of interest under Standing Order No. 31.6? I see that there are none.

[10] We have received apologies from Lynne Neagle, and I am not aware of any substitutions. As I have already pointed out, some Members will be moving from committee to committee, and there are some who are still in other committees and who will be late.

[11] As it is my first meeting, I ask you to be gentle with me, and that includes the people giving evidence. [*Laughter.*]

9.34 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Wneud y Gorau o Ddigwyddiadau Chwaraeon Mawr yng
Nghymru—Casglu Tystiolaeth: Undeb Hoci Cymru
Inquiry into Making the Most of Major Sporting Events in Wales—Evidence
Gathering: Welsh Hockey Union**

[12] **Sandy Mewies:** We now move on to item 2. Oral evidence is being gathered as part of this inquiry, and the call for evidence was made in November, with a closing date for responses of 15 January 2010. We have the major events of the Ryder Cup less than a year away and the Olympic Games three years away. Therefore, the committee decided it was timely to scrutinise the ongoing actions of the Welsh Government in preparation for major sporting events. Committee will be scrutinising how these events are used to encourage and widen participation in sports and physical activity, how the Welsh Government defines and supports major sporting events and how it supports national sports development and the people selected for national sport squads.

[13] I will invite Mike Leatt, who is the chief executive officer of the Welsh Hockey Union, to take a seat. You can assume that we have read your paper, but give us a brief introduction.

Members will then ask questions, and we will give you plenty of time to answer.

[14] **Mr Leatt:** Thank you, Chair, and committee. Having been asked to come to committee, I hope that I can add something to your deliberations. I submitted only a short piece of evidence because we are a minor sport, although I would like not to think so, but we are. Therefore, our contribution to major sporting activities is not as big as that of others. Nevertheless, in trying to step back and look at the whole picture, from a chief executive's point of view rather than a deliverer's point of view, we came across one or two interesting things when we looked to set up what for us was a major sporting event. We have not done that in hockey for a while, and we are looking to do a little more of that.

[15] Like all sports, we try to attract more people to play, to participate in other ways and, eventually, to improve our higher performance area, which can be done by getting greater volume at the lower levels. As an organisation, our turnover is around £800,000. We get £380,000 from the Sports Council for Wales, for which we are extremely grateful. We have seven office staff, five of whom are full-time staff, and we have 6,000 playing members, and about 18,000 people who play hockey in Wales, which obviously includes schools and other organisations that participate. So, that is our general situation at the moment.

[16] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much. If I remember correctly from my school days, the technical term is 'to bully off', so, Bethan, will you bully off?

[17] **Mr Leatt:** We have changed that rule now. I will tell you later. [*Laughter.*]

[18] **Sandy Mewies:** Am I right that you cannot hit people on the shins anymore?

[19] **Mr Leatt:** You never could. [*Laughter.*]

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** I remember playing hockey in school, but I will not go into that today. Thank you for coming to give evidence to us. You said that you hosted the 2009 European nations hockey trophy. How did you come to host that? Could you give us some background detail as to why you wanted to host the event and how you sought support to host it in Wales?

[21] **Mr Leatt:** The European Hockey Federation runs a system of inviting member nations to first enter competition and, secondly, to be considered as a host, or a venue. Therefore, in our board discussions, we looked at the pros and cons of putting ourselves forward to host an event. Obviously, advantages in bringing an event to Wales include the fact that you do not have to travel and giving our supporters and people interested in hockey an opportunity to see high-class hockey competition. At the same time, we were looking to try to generate more involvement from volunteers, because we rely on them quite significantly and we needed something to help focus their attention, activity and development.

[22] In north Wales, in particular, where we have a very good hockey facility, particularly the pitch, we were hoping to work with the organisations that we already work with—Glyndŵr University and the local authority—to try to improve the visibility of the sport and the opportunities for hockey at junior level. So, we were looking to do quite a lot of things on the back of submitting a bid. We did bid; there is a competition, which means filling in lots of forms and presenting yourself as a viable option. We held a small European tournament there in 2007 called the Celtic Cup, and the European hockey people came to look and they were fairly impressed with the way things were done, and that gave us a leg up really. So, we were not going in cold.

[23] So, when we came to the selection process we knew we had got down to the final two, and then it was between us and, I think, Basle in Switzerland. Fortunately, Wrexham got it,

and that was done purely as a selection panel procedure. Looking at the possible venues for that year—Vienna, Madrid, Rome and Wrexham—it is interesting to note that we were fighting against that level of opposition, if you like. So we were selected, we were awarded it, and we had about 15 months to prepare ourselves to deliver the tournament.

9.40 a.m.

[24] **Bethan Jenkins:** Did you try for this particular trophy in previous years, or was it a decision based on your financial backing?

[25] **Mr Leatt:** To my knowledge, we have not tried for anything this big. We have held European club tournaments before and we are looking to hold one again. We have been awarded one in Cardiff that is being held in April, which is a club level tournament, not an international level tournament. I believe that we held an under-21 international tournament, probably about 10 years ago.

[26] The second question you asked me was about funding.

[27] **Bethan Jenkins:** That will come up later, so I will leave it until then.

[28] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Bethan. The tournament was at Plas Coch, was it not?

[29] **Mr Leatt:** Yes, it was.

[30] **Eleanor Burnham:** I was not able to be there, unfortunately, but I had a minor role years ago when I played for Wrexham ladies and the Meirionnydd teams. I have a query from one of the participants at Glyndŵr University—I have checked that I am not asking anyone else's question—who asked how we encourage the media to take more interest. He particularly asks how we can encourage female participation in sports. The next question, with the Chair's indulgence, is how is Welsh Hockey Union Ltd trying to get the most out of the 2012 Olympics? Are you anticipating teams coming to Wales to train and acclimatise and whatever? Will any Welsh players get in the Great Britain teams, and will there be a high-profile pre-Olympic tournament?

[31] **Sandy Mewies:** Before you answer those questions, that is a good point about the media because I know Plas Coch very well and I am a fellow of Glyndŵr University—perhaps I should have declared that before I started. One of the questions I was going to ask at an appropriate time, and this may be it, is that although I was aware of what was happening there a couple of people said to me, 'I did not know there was such a big game going on until I saw people in their different tracksuits in Sainsbury's' which is just by the ground. Like Eleanor, I am interested to hear of the media interest.

[32] **Mr Leatt:** What is fascinating about sport is that you can have the biggest event on your doorstep and you do not know about it. I went to a very big competition in Manchester which was held two years ago to try to get a feel for a tournament. It was bigger than the one we were going to hold but the model was similar. No-one in Manchester knew that it was going on, not even the hotel that we stayed at.

[33] We were determined to try to do a little bit more than that. We worked with the local authority, and we set up a committee group some time before to try to look at, among other things, how we address the local media. The local authority was helpful. It publishes magazines that go round the whole of North Wales and they put notices and adverts in all of those, which went a long way out, and moved us forward.

[34] You start knocking off all the usual things—the papers, the radio, the television—and

try to build a relationship with them. It is very difficult for a minor sport, where there is no money. However, we did reasonably well. We got involved with BBC Wales and we got a bit of radio coverage. It showed some interest and came up and did a bit of television coverage, but that was all during the tournament. We got some snippets on the television, and for hockey, the fact that it appeared on the news was amazing.

[35] You have to buy into local radio stations—those that are any good—so we went along and had meetings with them. We paid a certain amount of money—we could not afford stacks. However, we got coverage on the hour, every hour, for the whole week beforehand, and they were kind enough to do something during the tournament because it was reasonably successful.

[36] For local newspapers, we set up events. We had an event in June, which was a Wales versus Ireland match, where we raised the profile as much as we could in the local community and we got stuff in the papers. Prior to that, we held a junior event where, again, we got stuff in the papers. We had a launch event with the local authority and also tried to give publicity to the possibility of teams coming vis-à-vis 2012.

[37] I can give you a long list of all the efforts that we made—

[38] **Sandy Mewies:** What was the outcome?

[39] **Mr Leatt:** The outcome was that we got a little bit of television time—we got cameras there and we got a couple of interviews. We got quite a lot of publicity in local papers and we had stuff on the radio as a precursor. We even dished stuff out to local schools in the weeks prior to the tournament and provided coaching in those schools. Considering the size of our organisation—

[40] **Sandy Mewies:** It was reasonable.

[41] **Mr Leatt:** We were quite pleased with the publicity that we had, but we know that, if we are going to make a significant headway, we have to have more.

[42] **Sandy Mewies:** Eleanor raised two other points. Will you answer those points very quickly, because this is a supplementary and I want to make sure everyone else gets a chance to ask their questions before we bring in the next person giving evidence? Eleanor, it was about the position of women and the Olympics, was it not?

[43] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. Will teams come for training, camps or acclimatisation? Will there be any Welsh players in the GB team and will there be a high profile pre-Olympic tournament?

[44] **Sandy Mewies:** Please keep your answers very short.

[45] **Mr Leatt:** We are not handling the process of attracting Olympic hockey teams directly. That is being handled centrally.

[46] **Sandy Mewies:** In London?

[47] **Mr Leatt:** From the Welsh point of view, David Evans is handling it. We have offered to help because we have relationships with different federations, so I do not know what the situation is at the moment.

[48] With regard to women, our women have a higher profile than the men, but more people come to watch the men than they do the women. We have a female player in the GB Olympic

team.

[49] **Eleanor Burnham:** Why do you not play in mixed teams? Perhaps you might get the best of both worlds.

[50] **Mr Leatt:** We do play mixed hockey, but unfortunately that is not a recognised sport.

[51] The girls are going to the Commonwealth Games and both the girls and boys pay for themselves to go to the World Cup qualifiers and we are trying to do as much as we can on the back of that. More recently Beth Fisher, an international player, has been interviewed on BBC Radio Wales. She is arranging a series of activities and we are trying to make the best of that.

[52] **Sandy Mewies:** I will bring Mark Isherwood in now.

[53] **Mark Isherwood:** Perhaps I should declare I was your guest at that event.

[54] **Mr Leatt:** Yes. Thank you very much.

[55] **Mark Isherwood:** We are seeking to establish whether sporting events will effect lasting change in communities. You stated in your evidence that your aims in the event included increasing participation among young people, increasing your volunteer base, and hopefully delivering sustainable sporting activity among school-age children. To what extent do you feel that those aims were achieved and, if so, how did you achieve them?

[56] **Mr Leatt:** The aims have been achieved in part. It takes a lot of concerted effort to effect change. We were able to ensure that the development officer that we have working in the three unitary authorities in North Wales had more time in schools leading up to this event. We are now looking to maintain that level of activity. There are lots of young people playing hockey at junior level, but the key is that we have to get these players into clubs, and to do that, we need healthy clubs. Therefore, we need to focus our effort on developing the club within the community to provide good coaching, and all those things, so that we can attract these people to the game for longer term activity.

[57] Therefore I would like to work closer with the clubs in North Wales and, indeed, with clubs in the rest of Wales, to strengthen their position. That is one of our main and longer-term focuses over the next three to four years.

[58] **Sandy Mewies:** Did you come to the conclusion that there was a real benefit to junior hockey?

9.50 a.m.

[59] **Mr Leatt:** I did. We had quite a lot of interest. What we have got to do is maintain the level of activity and provide through the—I have forgotten what the word is now. We need to give them a route into the clubs. We have only a couple of clubs in Wrexham and therefore we need more clubs in north Wales to foster the development of these players.

[60] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is the word you are looking for ‘progression’?

[61] **Mr Leatt:** ‘Progression’ is one word. I have forgotten what the teachers call it when you sort of—

[62] **Sandy Mewies:** It does not matter. ‘Progression’ or ‘pathways’ will do.

[63] **Mr Leatt:** That will do.

[64] **Eleanor Burnham:** A oeddech yn ymwybodol o'r uned digwyddiadau mawr sydd gennym cyn cael gwybod ei fod yn bodoli, ac os nad oeddech yn ymwybodol ohono, pam ydych yn meddwl nad oeddech yn ymwybodol o'i fodolaeth? **Eleanor Burnham:** Were you aware of the major events unit that we have before being advised of its existence, and if you were not aware of it, why do you think that you not aware of its existence?

[65] **Mr Leatt:** I was not aware of the major events unit before we embarked upon the process of bidding for this activity. In my innocence, I thought that it had just been set up. Therefore, when I went along I thought, 'Oh well, this is new, so we are just entering this at a time when it is new'. Why did I not know about it before? Maybe I should have done, but I did not.

[66] **Eleanor Burnham:** That was not an implied criticism. I was just trying to find out who knows about these matters.

[67] **Sandy Mewies:** How did you find out?

[68] **Mr Leatt:** Anne Ellis told me. She seems to know most things, so if in doubt, ask her.

[69] **Sandy Mewies:** So, it is not completely unknown to the hockey world. Are you happy with that, Eleanor?

[70] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, thank you very much.

[71] **Mr Leatt:** To be fair, once we embarked upon this, the Sports Council for Wales also indicated that we should do something with that.

[72] **Joyce Watson:** May I ask a supplementary question?

[73] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes, of course.

[74] **Joyce Watson:** You said that once you had embarked upon this, the sports council told you, if I understood you correctly, of the existence of a major events unit. To me, that seems to be the wrong way round and I think that this is something that we need to pursue. You need to enable people to feel secure in going forward, even in bidding for a major event. Those people need to know of the existence of the help before they embark on a project. If it is the other way round and people do not feel empowered or enabled, they might not do what you have done—you obviously felt empowered and enabled and you were going to do it whatever happened. We need to pursue that further.

[75] **Mr Leatt:** I would agree.

[76] **Sandy Mewies:** We are pursuing the major events unit a bit further with Dai's question.

[77] **David Lloyd:** May I just admit that I played in a charity mixed hockey match in my student days? It was not just the shins that were the parts of the anatomy that were being attacked, I have to say.

[78] Further on the Welsh Government's major events unit, can you describe your experience of working with the unit and what feedback have you given on that experience? How could the unit be improved? How could the support that you received be improved for

the next time that you, or a similar organisation, would want to interface with the major events unit?

[79] **Mr Leatt:** We dealt with two people from the unit, Gwilym and Sara. I found them very helpful, but I also found it a slightly frustrating experience and I will explain why. Having gone along for a meeting with them in the first instance, I felt that they did not quite know what I should do to apply because I was not arranging a Ryder Cup or a similar event. So, I picked up some of their data and suggested that I put those things down against some of the criteria that they had for other activities. So, we put that forward. I was then asked for further material at several points, which we then put forward. All of it was reasonable, but I felt that they were almost building our submission as we went. I was not clear what was required of me at the beginning, although we built it, which is why I thought it was a new unit or it was new in this instance.

[80] Having made the submission, it was very difficult to get a decision out of them. We were sort of teetering on the brink about whether we did or did not go for it, even though we had been awarded it. Fortunately, we had some money from UK Sport following a submission I made on two pages of paper. They asked some questions, they awarded us the money, it came in, we told them what we were doing with it and that was the end of it. Since then, we have given them a short report. That was £10,000.

[81] It took a long time for the £5,000 that we were promised here to be approved. When it was, I thought we were getting it before the event—in fact, that was the inference—but we did not get it. We were then asked to write several reports. I knew that we were going to need to write a report and I did report on various things as we went along, but they seemed to be uncertain about the level of reporting required. It seemed to grow as the months went by and, at one point, we got quite frustrated and I said, jokingly, ‘I bet you’re going to want a full financial report before the end’. Guess what they asked for next. It was as if I had given them a new answer to their question.

[82] So, we gave them the full financial report, but it always takes time to wrap that up. We did that and I think that we got the money in December. If that is the process, it is a really difficult one for little sports with few people and all the rest of it.

[83] **Sandy Mewies:** That is what we are trying to get out of this: what the difficulties are. Are you saying there was some lack of clarity about the process?

[84] **Mr Leatt:** Yes.

[85] **Sandy Mewies:** Also, there was some frustration for you in the amount of work that you had to do and the fact that you had to provide it in dribs and drabs rather than being told, ‘This is what you are going to have to provide’. Is that what you are saying?

[86] **Mr Leatt:** Yes. There was a very thick contract, which we signed. I think that we did that around June. It was a legal document, which is fair enough. We looked through that and it did specify certain things and we thought that we were covering those.

[87] **Sandy Mewies:** On the same subject, Alun Davies is not here, so I will ask the question that he was going to ask. I think that you have touched on it because you mentioned that you received payment retrospectively. You are a small sport, I do not suppose that you have loads of money sloshing around, and it is a high-risk activity for you. Did that cause you particular problems?

[88] **Mr Leatt:** It might have done, but it did not. The only reason that it did not was because we had a reasonable cash flow.

[89] **Eleanor Burnham:** How long did it take? You mentioned December, but we did not quite catch when you started on the application. How many months did it take before you received it?

[90] **Mr Leatt:** It took 12 months. The first meeting was in December the previous year.

[91] **Sandy Mewies:** Joyce, would you mind taking the two questions before yours as well?

[92] **Joyce Watson:** In your recommendations, you mentioned that it would be good to reduce the level of bureaucracy. Could you describe how you felt the process to be bureaucratic and could you give us some thoughts on how we might be able to address that?

[93] **Mr Leatt:** In my previous rhetoric, I just mentioned the process. I think that if I knew a little bit more about the MEU and knew what the process was that we would need to go through, preparation and submission would be a one-shot type of activity. I think that that would help.

[94] Secondly, fully understanding the reporting process and knowing the dates for reporting would be helpful. Knowing precisely when we were going to get the money would also have been helpful.

[95] **Joyce Watson:** I think that that has also answered the second question.

[96] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that you are right.

[97] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would there have been an eventuality when they would have refused funding? I ask this because I know of some organisations that come up with ideas to host events like this and are put off in the initial stages because they are told by someone not from the unit or a Government official, that a bid would not be successful and they are therefore stopped at the first hurdle. Was there a time where you thought, 'Actually, we are going to have to fund this ourselves, without the support of anybody else'?

[98] **Mr Leatt:** There was. It was a risk and it is a sort of chicken-and-egg situation really. You can go around, maybe line up some support, and go for it, but you might not get awarded the opportunity; alternatively, you might and then the support is withdrawn. So, there is a degree of risk there.

10.00 a.m.

[99] **Joyce Watson:** Your evidence is that it is costly and resource intensive for the small national governing bodies of sport to operate independently, and you outlined that this morning. You also call for greater collaboration between Government, the sports council, authorities and the NGBs. What is working and not working in relation to collaboration in Wales at the moment?

[100] **Mr Leatt:** I can talk only from my own perspective with my sport, but there is so much happening and yet it is all in little pockets all over the place. Everybody, independently, is trying to do the right thing. There is quite a lot of effort at the moment to try to get a single strategic approach, working through local authorities, with the sports council, with NGBs, and any other groups. However, it is almost as though we need a single mindset about what we are trying to achieve and then go and do it. It might be that a part of that single mindset is to hold a series of major events, identifying certain sports for whatever reasons, and then we can market that somehow, through all the agencies available. Just think of the power of getting all the local authorities on board and every governing body involved in a particular sport—or

even not involved. You would then start to get across to the whole community that a particular event is taking place, and it need not be a big event.

[101] **Joyce Watson:** I will just explore this further. You are saying that yours is a minority sport but sport, like everything else, has its day and its time. You are trying to bring forward a younger generation. I have been looking at sports such as handball, which lots of young people would be interested in, but they cannot play them because of the blocks that you have just talked about. Do you think that it would help to bring new sports and new interests to the fore?

[102] **Mr Leatt:** Yes, it could. In essence, you are just trying to encourage people out there to be active. One difficulty if you get too many things for them to do is that you get a dispersal, or a thinning, of capability, but if you get people at junior levels active and they are trying all different sports, which I know happens at primary school, it is great. The next step is to provide the opportunity for them to choose what they want to do and to do it properly. I am not sure whether that answers your question, really. I suppose that giving people a taster of a sport at a lower level will get them interested. If there is nowhere to go after that, to progress with the sport, I guess that their interest dies.

[103] **Sandy Mewies:** Eleanor, if there is time at the end of the session, you may come in, but other people want to come in first. Bethan, let us go to your next question, please.

[104] **Bethan Jenkins:** In your evidence, you do not seem to mention the Welsh Sports Association. Does it have a role in supporting smaller NGBs to organise larger events or is that for other organisations?

[105] **Mr Leatt:** The WSA supports smaller NGBs, but we are considered to be a larger NGB. We can still access support from the WSA, but that tends to be advice and consultancy rather than physical support.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** When you submit your funding applications, would you go to the WSA for support of that nature?

[107] **Mr Leatt:** No, I did not in this case, although we could ask how it would advise us to approach it.

[108] **Bethan Jenkins:** Do you see a wider role for the WSA in this area, or would that be for the sports council? Would that pose a duplication of support?

[109] **Mr Leatt:** No, the WSA could provide a support function. In other words, if it knew about the processes of setting up a tournament and where you could access support, it could provide that sort of advice, but I do not think that it would be interested in, or capable of, providing the help to set it up. There is so much out there but we do not know about it. If there was a central place that had the responsibility for holding that information at least and you knew that you could go there, that is where we would go. We do go to the WSA with other issues, however, so that may be a good idea.

[110] **Mark Isherwood:** Following on from that, you recommend the collective approach of drawing on expertise from a centrally provided unit to reduce risk and maximise benefits, but where would you put such a unit? Where would it reside and who would be responsible for managing it?

[111] **Mr Leatt:** I am not sure that I have the best answer to that question. As the major events unit is involved in this, it could naturally develop an information arm or, as you suggested, within the sporting arena, maybe the WSA could develop an information arm in

that respect. Alternatively, the two might work together collaboratively. It is a possibility.

[112] **Mark Isherwood:** Would there be greater or fewer advantages if this were to be a direct arm of government? Should it be arm's length from government?

[113] **Mr Leatt:** If it was slightly outside government, I suppose that the commercial aspect could be developed and progressed a little more easily than if it were within government. I am not sure.

[114] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, Mark. You may now come in very briefly, Eleanor.

[115] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am quite confused, because I thought that you would be referring to the sports council's role this morning. It is the overarching body that should be supporting all sports, so I am thoroughly confused. Can you also explain very briefly the role of the WLGA in this, because it is a very important body that co-ordinates activities throughout local authorities. Does it have a sports department or a sports person or whatever?

[116] **Mr Leatt:** What is the WLGA?

[117] **Eleanor Burnham:** The Welsh Local Government Association. You have no contact with it, obviously.

[118] **Mr Leatt:** No.

[119] **Sandy Mewies:** You can really talk only about your own associations.

[120] **Eleanor Burnham:** No, but I am asking because the Welsh Local Government Association, as we all know, is a vast body that—

[121] **Sandy Mewies:** Maybe that is a question that we can ask the WLGA.

[122] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, fine. What about the sports council?

[123] **Mr Leatt:** Papers have been developed recently on performance and excellence but also activity particularly. I know that the chief executive officers of NGBs have a group and that there was a nominated person to engage with that group. That probably covered some of the aspects that you were talking about, about the WLGA, but I cannot be precise about that.

[124] The sports council offers advice from time to time on sporting events, but my impression has certainly been that that is not a major thing for it. We have got information from it almost on a by-luck basis.

[125] **Sandy Mewies:** Eleanor, the sports council will be coming in to give evidence, so that might be useful for us.

[126] **Mr Leatt:** I do not want to land them in it, but—

[127] **Eleanor Burnham:** No, you have come to tell us how you see it. That is what we want to know.

[128] **Sandy Mewies:** The final question is from me, Mike. I thank you very much for your paper and the evidence that you have given. I can tell you that you will have a transcript of this meeting and you will be able to correct points, for accuracy, should you wish to do so.

[129] The aim of taking this evidence is to see how events have unfolded for you in your

sport. You have come up with a few points that have given us food for thought as regards improvement, but is there anything else that you think could have made the process easier for you, could have been handled differently or, indeed, that worked very well?

10.10 a.m.

[130] **Mr Leatt:** We did not know enough, to be honest. We went into the process knowing that we wanted to do this but not knowing enough about how to do it. There are many reasons why that might be, but our own knowledge was insufficient. It is better now, having been through the process.

[131] Sorry, can you remind me of your first question?

[132] **Sandy Mewies:** How could the process have been improved for you? On the point that you have just made, do you think that, before you started, you should have been able to get a lot of briefing on how the process worked? You seem to be saying that you went in and that there was no briefing. Would more information before you started the process have been useful to you?

[133] **Mr Leatt:** Yes, it would. It might have scared us off but it would have been useful in relation to some of the areas that we might have approached prior to dipping our toes in the water. That said, there was a fair amount of confidence that, if we did go for it, there were areas from which we would be able to get support. However, if the process was clearer one would embark on it in a slightly different way.

[134] **Sandy Mewies:** You have mentioned issues about money and when it was paid, and so on. Will you be sharing, or have you shared, any of your experiences with similar organisations? Will you cascade them down, up or across?

[135] **Mr Leatt:** We have done that within hockey in Europe. There was a gathering where, ironically—and this shows you that there is a lack of knowledge all over the place—we were asked to give our views about how the tournament went, what went well and what did not go well. We learned that having a partnership approach was extremely successful because you get two or three bits of an organisation delivering. It is successful for the community, but it also produced a much better product. In terms of what went well, the European Hockey Federation was very supportive of the way in which we were doing things and was delighted with the product—so much so that they wanted to hold a World Cup qualifier at Glyndŵr University in February. We pointed out that all the students would be there then and that the rooms would not be available, so it would not work. A collaborative approach shares knowledge and leads to more people getting involved and more people benefiting.

[136] **Sandy Mewies:** That has been very useful indeed. Thank you very much for taking the trouble to come here today and prepare the paper, and for giving your evidence so clearly.

[137] **Mr Leatt:** Thank you very much.

10.13 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Wneud y Gorau o Ddigwyddiadau Chwaraeon Mawr yng
Nghymru—Casglu Tystiolaeth: Welsh Badminton Cymru
Inquiry into Making the Most of Major Sporting Events in Wales—Evidence
Gathering: Welsh Badminton Cymru**

[138] **Sandy Mewies:** We will now move on to the second part of this session and bring in

Mr Eddie O'Neill from Welsh Badminton Cymru

[139] We operate bilingually, so if you do not speak Welsh, you can turn the headset to channel 1 for interpretation. If you need amplification of sound, that is available on channel 0. If you have a mobile phone or BlackBerry with you, please switch it off before we start the proceedings.

[140] Good morning and welcome, and thank you very much for your paper. As I have said previously, you can assume that everybody has read it. You might like to give us a short introduction, and then I will invite Members to ask questions.

[141] **Mr O'Neill:** My name is Eddie O'Neill. I am not Welsh; I am half Scottish and half Irish. I am not quite sure which half is which—I think that the Irish half is the top half, but now and again the Scottish half comes up to the top half as well, so it is a difficult life to lead.

[142] I have been in Wales for 15 years. For all that time, I have been involved in Welsh Badminton Cymru, mostly at national coaching level and in the last six months the good Lord has seen fit to elevate me to executive officer status. I am in the process of restructuring and redoing this and that for Welsh Badminton Cymru. I have a lot of experience of sport in Wales, both at performance level and in observing the sorts of things that you are interested in, such as major events, what to do with them and what not to do with them.

[143] As you said, everybody has read my paper. I hope it does not paint a bleak picture of what I think of sporting events in Wales—I have tried not to do that. However, I believe that sporting events are extremely important for the national psyche. I still keep a close eye on things in Scotland, England and Ireland, and everywhere else over the world, and I can see how sporting events stimulate everybody in the country, to allow people to escape and also to motivate the population, especially young people, to get involved in activity.

[144] I know that, in Wales, trying to engage kids in schools is a big thing, and we are at the forefront of that. It is crucial.

[145] However, I worry, and I have worried for 15 years, about the amount of money that Wales puts into sport and events and how it runs them and so on—that theme runs through my paper. So, that is where I am. I am not here to complain and moan—far from it. However, I am concerned that, when we benchmark ourselves—and when I say 'we', I mean Wales—against other countries that are not that much bigger than us, we do not come out tremendously well. I hope that there are some positive elements in the paper, but I also hope that it gives you a flavour of what I think about these matters.

[146] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you very much indeed. Dai has the first question.

[147] **David Lloyd:** Thank you for your paper, Eddie, and thank you for your opening remarks. As you said, the review that this committee is undertaking is into making the most of major sporting events. In your paper, you highlight the way in which major sporting events can facilitate engagement with deprived communities and benefit communities by stimulating demand. From your experience through badminton competitions, could you describe how you have seen events achieve these aims of benefiting deprived communities?

[148] **Mr O'Neill:** When I came here first, the most successful places in Wales for badminton were Anglesey and the A470 corridor up as far as Merthyr Tydfil, and it is starting to get that way again. By definition, they are not the most affluent areas in Wales, but they were the most successful in terms of participation and performance. You ask yourself why that is. It is to do with all sorts of things. It is to do with local dynamics and people on the ground, but it is also to do with the various activities that were run at that particular time.

Events had a higher profile, such as the Welsh international and Welsh open championships. The national championships and various other events at a local level were better organised.

[149] After a few years, when the had dynamic changed, you could see that the A470 corridor and Anglesey went the opposite way, and the participation in badminton almost disappeared to the degree that mid Glamorgan had no teams and no structure as such. It went from being the strongest to being the weakest. Anglesey is the same. The north Wales corridor produced many good players and that has almost disappeared.

[150] When I first came here, it was obvious to me that the affluent areas, such as Monmouthshire and Gwent, were way behind. That tells you that if you can stimulate interest, the interest is there. Ironically, it is kicking in again because the 5x60 project, which is a fantastic project, has stimulated demand up the A470 corridor. We are having a meeting next week with some of the local authorities in that area, as they are becoming not overwhelmed, but stimulated by the demand for this sport. The interest is there—there is no doubt about that whatsoever. It needs the right people and investment, structure, processes, outcomes, pathways and all those clever phrases that are currently bandied about.

10.20 a.m.

[151] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning. I read your paper with interest—it was honest. In what ways does Welsh Badminton Cymru use big events to raise the profile of the game and engage the wider public in Wales?

[152] **Mr O'Neill:** The biggest event is the Welsh international. We try our very best to advertise that as much as we can. Given that we do not have huge amounts of money, the marketing is fairly simplistic: it is through our website and the posters that we put up in sports centres and schools and so on. That does not, to be honest, attract much interest, so perhaps there is a trick that we are missing out on, in terms of dragging people into the Welsh Institute of Sport when that event is on. It is a wonderful event.

[153] That is our major event. We have our national championships and various competitive structures, but it is really difficult to get people to come in and engage in it. It is certain that no-one will pay to come. We spend £400 every year on tickets that nobody buys, so that either says we are extremely poor at making the public aware of it or that the mechanisms for throwing this thing into the public psyche are not there. For example, I remember when I first came down, you could find instances of the Welsh international championships being televised on S4C but, with the greatest respect, unless you spoke Welsh, you would have had no idea what was going on. It was catered for within the nationalistic psyche, but in terms of engaging the large percentage of people who do not speak Welsh, who you want to get in through the doors to support these events, I think that it is almost impossible to get a sufficient level of exposure.

[154] **Joyce Watson:** Does Welsh Badminton Cymru rely on partners to achieve its aims, and if it does, which partners do you rely on?

[155] **Mr O'Neill:** Our major partner is the Sports Council for Wales, which is our major funding partner. In fact, in some respects, it is our only funding partner. It gives us a minimum of 75 per cent of our income, so it is our major partner. On our other partnerships in terms of advertising and raising the profile of our events, we used to have some partners when I first came down here, but we have lost those. I think that that may be as a result of people thinking that their money would be best spent elsewhere or that there has been an amalgamation of small companies into bigger companies and they consider that their marketing budget would be best spent in other places, in Asia and Europe, where the sport is bigger. We have lost the plot a little in the last decade; where we used to have myriad small

partners and investors, they have disappeared.

[156] We are working very hard to try to see how we can attract them back to being associated with Welsh badminton. We truly believe that Wales and Welsh Badminton Cymru is a dynamic brand. It really is. I mean, if you cannot do anything with a dragon, for example, you should get shot. [*Laughter.*]

[157] We may have got too hung up on trying to satisfy our major funding partner, whose remit is different to ours. In other words, it is about more and better provision. We understand that that is what needs to be done, but almost 100 per cent of our resource has been aimed towards trying to survive on an annual basis by securing funding, rather than growing organically by trying to make the events more attractive.

[158] **Eleanor Burnham:** My only experience of badminton was playing in the Pavilion in Corwen. You probably know that the Pavilion is brilliant for concerts because it has a gradient, but that does not make it ideal for badminton. I was never very successful anyway, but it was good fun. This situation is really very sad. Apart from the socioeconomic barriers, do you think that our society is too focused on too few sports? This situation is sad because I think that badminton is a fantastic game to play.

[159] **Mr O'Neill:** It is a fantastic game and I think that you could say that if you cannot engage people in something like badminton, you are going to have a lot of difficulty engaging them in tennis or squash. In terms of squash, and a lot of other sports, you need to have a certain skill level to be able to do anything with it at all. You could easily get cheesed off within five minutes of trying to hit a squash ball, but with badminton it is almost a case of the lower your skill level, the more fun it is.

[160] **Eleanor Burnham:** Really?

[161] **Mr O'Neill:** It is because it makes fools of people. [*Laughter.*]

[162] When you see the performance level, it is probably less engaging in some respects than seeing four people flailing around trying to hit the thing without knowing where it is going to go. So, it is a sport that you can do all sorts of things with. When I coach, in various leisure centres, I am usually surrounded by people who cannot play, and all you hear is laughter. From a governing body point of view, if we cannot grow badminton, there is something badly wrong.

[163] However, as I say, we scratch around because we do not have enough money, trying to buy ideas from other people. I think that we have got into this mindset of not standing alone to grow the sport ourselves and not taking ownership or taking charge of the sport in Wales. We have got into the mindset of thinking that if we do not have any money, there is no point in doing anything. I have seen that happen in the last 10 years and that is what we are desperately trying to change now.

[164] There are good things happening in all sports. The Sports Council for Wales has had a good look at itself, in conjunction with you guys, and it seems to be changing a lot and becoming far more dynamic in the way it looks at sports, and I welcome that. We have this good initiative now in schools, 5x60, which is unique to Wales. We have latched on to that, as I guess have other sports. We piloted that scheme and have run with it for a year. We can see that there is a huge demand for that, so we are very optimistic about that. To get back to the beginning, if you can get 30 kids in and give them a go at badminton, it is practically guaranteed that 75 per cent will come back the following week, whether they can play or not.

[165] **Sandy Mewies:** Before Eleanor moves on to her next question, would you explain a bit

more about the 5x60? I do not know what it is.

[166] **Mr O'Neill:** It is a schools initiative. The basic idea is that someone is employed in all schools in Wales—normally a young person—as a 5x60 officer. Their job is to try to get all the children doing one hour of activity five times a week. That activity does not necessarily have to be sport. There are all sorts of fancy things that they do, but it gives sports like ours an opportunity to go in and sell our wares. We have to knock on the door and say, ‘Why don’t you give badminton a go?’ That is what it is all about. Some sports are at the forefront of doing that, but there are others that I do not know what they are doing.

[167] **Sandy Mewies:** That is very useful.

[168] **Mr O'Neill:** There are all sorts of queer things that they are doing that are not sport but which come under the guise of physical activity. Our job is to try to engage all of those 220-odd schools in badminton, and that is what I think they are doing quite successfully up around the A470 corridor and in various other places. However, again, there is a lack of resources. We have only six people who are working one day a week to try to achieve that.

[169] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that you made a very important point about the fact that anybody can take it on—you certainly could not say that about hockey because you would hit somebody or injure somebody. It is a very important point.

[170] Yr ydych yn pwysleisio pa mor bwysig yw cael strategaeth ar gyfer y cyfnod ar ôl digwyddiad mawr. A oes gennych unrhyw enghreifftiau o strategaethau llwyddiannus o’r fath yn y byd badminton neu mewn unrhyw fath arall o chwaraeon? You highlight the importance of a post-event strategy following a major event. Do you have any examples of what you would consider to be successful strategies, for instance in badminton or any other kinds of sport?

[171] **Mr O'Neill:** A post-event strategy is all about asking, ‘What have we got, does it work and can we improve it?’. Do we have such a strategy? No, not in badminton. I think that we just hope that what we have is going to be good enough for the following year and we just repeat it.

[172] If you look at badminton on a worldwide basis, they have responded to the fact that the game was a little bit too long and a little bit boring. The scoring system baffled everybody and I certainly think that it would put most kids off—they could not understand it in any way, shape or form. I certainly could not understand it and I have been playing badminton for years.

10.30 a.m.

[173] The sport itself has responded very well, so outside Wales, on a worldwide level, it has responded to events. The scoring system now makes the game shorter, and all sorts of other things have been done. If you go to the all-England championships in Birmingham, which is a major event, people come on and dance around in between the matches and there is music played and all that sort of stuff. So it has become more dynamic. There has been a change in clothing codes. People are allowed to wear clothes with advertising on them and the players are encouraged to be cool. So it has changed.

[174] In Wales, we tend to sign up to things 10 years after everybody else. We have a reactive approach, rather than a proactive one. Do we do post-event analysis? Not really. We will be doing it from now on, but we have not done so in the past. We have just gone with the same product. That is, perhaps, one reason why attendance at the Welsh international is not what it was. For example, we still use cards for announcing people’s names at the Welsh

international, which is laughable when everybody else has an electronic display with the names up and music and what have you.

[175] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is it a bit like cheerleading at American games?

[176] **Mr O'Neill:** Yes. It sometimes goes too far. It is human nature to go from one extreme to another and then find a compromise in the middle eventually. You have nothing, and then all of a sudden you have 500 dancers coming on and jumping around. Eventually, you end up in the middle with something that is a good product. I think that we are getting there.

[177] However, in Wales we need to be sensitive, and not just reactive, and to look at our own product and ask, 'Never mind what anybody else is doing, how can we make this more attractive to everybody within Wales?'. I think that we are starting to catch on to that now. So if I come back next year and you ask me, 'What about post-event strategies?' I would like to think that I would say, 'Actually, we have some'.

[178] **Sandy Mewies:** I take it from what you have said that that is something that you are doing now, but it has not been done a lot.

[179] **Mr O'Neill:** Definitely. I do not know about any of the other sports, but in Welsh badminton we pretty much hit rock bottom about a year ago for all sorts of reasons—our governance was poor and our confidence was poor—but we are on the way up. There is an upward curve in badminton, and that is only because we have looked at good business practices and taken them on board and embraced the need to do the sort of things that you asked me about.

[180] For example, we did not do any budget analysis of any of our events. Anecdotally, you would hear that this or that was losing money, but there was no evidence to tell you how much the loss was. Now we know exactly what is losing money. You cannot put any sort of strategy together if you do not have budget control. If you are making £100,000, you do not need a strategy, but if you are losing £5,000, you better have one for next year. So those sorts of things were not in place. I suspect that it is the same in a lot of other sports.

[181] **Mark Isherwood:** Moving on to the funding theme, you consider, as you made quite clear, that badminton is underfunded in Wales, compared to badminton in other parts of the UK, and you also criticise a focus on what you consider to be sports that reflect the socioeconomic history of Wales. Has this been reflected in your dealings with the lead bodies such as the Welsh Government and the sports council, and do you have any suggestions to remedy that?

[182] **Mr O'Neill:** I have not had dealings with anybody other than the Sports Council for Wales, so the information that I have about the relationship between all the various bodies is somewhat anecdotal—it is not 100 per cent anecdotal, but somewhat so. I do not get involved in this, but I know, for example, that the Sports Council for Wales has had an interesting relationship with the Welsh Assembly Government over the years. I would not purport to be an expert in the politics of that, but it has clouded matters. I think that it has set sport back. I do not want to say any more than that about it, because otherwise I will make a fool of myself, but I believe that there is now some clarity in that relationship. I do not know whether it is driven from here or from the Sports Council—well, I am sure that it is driven from here.

[183] Wales is a country that loves certain sports because they reflect the national psyche. You come up out of a hole in the ground after a hard day's work and you take part in a tough sport and I think that that is fantastic, but that can sometimes limit you. It can limit the growth of a country if you put all your eggs in one basket. All these other sports, such as ours, where there is no funding, just hid behind the notion that somehow talent would come out in any

case, but it does not because the nature of our young people in our society has changed, and we have sat around for a long time and not looked for any talent. It is there, but that leaves us with the sports council.

[184] The sports council does not fund us as well, because, I guess, it does not have any money to fund us as well. It asks for an awful lot for its dollar and I guess the reason for that is that there are lots of demands made of it by you guys, because you need to see statistics and performance and more people doing this and that. However, that comes at a price. If you do not invest and you do not provide people on the ground with the capacity to go and knock on doors and sell things, nobody is going to buy anything. Sport is no different to anything else. If you sit around waiting for the phone to ring, you are going to be bust in a very short time.

[185] So, we are poorly funded. Our funding is way down on that in Scotland. Scotland, I have to say, seems to put an awful lot more money into sport than Wales does across all of the various sports. Rugby and football are big sports in Scotland as well, but badminton is also seen positively. By the time 2014 comes along, Scotland will have had three Commonwealth Games. It has had two world championships in badminton and all sorts of stuff. We do not have any hope of attracting such events, because we do not even have a dedicated training facility. We use the Welsh Institute of Sport, which is not really an institute of sport because it does not really have an institute budget. The Scottish Institute of Sport and the English Institute of Sport have budgets.

[186] What sums it all up nicely for me is that if you have badminton players who are on Great Britain funding—which we have not had—and then they lose that for whatever reason, because their ranking goes down or something, in England and Scotland there is a parachute system that can support them, because they then become very important for domestic competition and Commonwealth Games. In Wales there would be nothing—there is no money, unless I find it from somewhere and rob Peter to pay Paul.

[187] So, in any other country in the world, the Welsh Institute of Sport would be an institution with a budget. However, all it is really is a sports centre that sells its facilities to the highest bidder and coincidentally accommodates some elite sports in Wales.

[188] **Sandy Mewies:** I will just bring you to an end on that, because there are questions to come and you are drifting into some of those areas.

[189] **Mr O'Neill:** I tend to do that—Irish and Scottish, as I said.

[190] **Sandy Mewies:** Indeed, I know the feeling. Bethan, would you ask question 17, please?

[191] **Bethan Jenkins:** In what areas do you consider us to be lacking the kinds of facilities that might attract major events, especially for sports such as badminton?

[192] **Mr O'Neill:** Let me give you a good example. Badminton Europe has really pulled its socks up. Asia and Europe have been fighting with each other for years, and Badminton Europe was a bit like Wales a decade ago, pretty much hanging on the coattails of the International Badminton Federation, but it has now revitalised itself and is a very dynamic organisation.

[193] One reason for that is that it has a really big development programme and it tries to engage all sorts of countries in hosting events for Badminton Europe. You can make money, for example, by hosting Badminton Europe summer schools and events in almost any country if you have the facilities and tick all the boxes.

[194] We have been asked to do that, but a criterion for that is that we have to have a dedicated training facility where our performance players train every day. Our performance players train in the Welsh Institute of Sport, but it is not a dedicated facility because if some big trade show comes along we get chucked out for a week.

10.40 a.m.

[195] As far as Badminton Europe is concerned, that is a no-no straight away, and that means that we cannot host events that are funded partly by Badminton Europe, which would raise the profile in Wales, because we lack dedicated facilities. That is a prime training facility. When you take that out into Wales as a whole, all you have are schools and sports centres. If you are a performance player in north Wales, you are in big trouble because you cannot train everyday anyway. You have to hire courts in a sports centre. So, for us to take a Badminton Europe event to north Wales is a total impossibility. That is where we are hamstrung.

[196] **Bethan Jenkins:** Have you raised these issues with the sports council in terms of telling it that you seek these type of events but are hindered because of the lack of facilities?

[197] **Mr O'Neill:** David Evans has kind of given up a little bit with me, but, in the beginning, we had lots of conversations about what we could attract into Wales pre-2012, and one of the questions was on what we can do in badminton. When I told him that we were hamstrung because of a lack of facility, I am sure that he found that frustrating. That sent him scurrying off in all sorts of directions, to athletics and various other people, but there really was not much I could do for him. However, in Scotland and England, it is easy because they have their own dedicated facilities and they can do whatever they like there, even though they allow the public and various other organisations to use them. Not having the facility here hamstring us big time.

[198] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yr ydych yn pwysleisio'r angen i ddinasoedd ac awdurdodau lleol gefnogi digwyddiadau a mathau penodol o chwaraeon. A allwch chi ymhelaethu ar sut mae dinasoedd wedi hyrwyddo digwyddiadau yn eich profiad chi? **Eleanor Burnham:** You highlight the importance of cities and local authorities supporting events and specific sports. Could you expand on the ways in which you have seen cities promoting events?

[199] **Mr O'Neill:** I will take my own country, Scotland, as an example. Glasgow City Council will host the Commonwealth Games in 2014. The council partly funded the Scottish Badminton Academy, and it is extremely proactive in supporting sport in and around Glasgow. For example, the Great Scottish Run has been held for years, and it has just spent a lot of money in the Scotstoun leisure centre, redoing the track, even though international athletics events were hosted there already. So, clearly there is a realisation that major international sporting events bring profile to the city. Cardiff is a wonderful city; just look at the regeneration. When I first came down here, people would not go anywhere near the bay because it was horrible, but look at what has happened. It has got so much going for it, and yet, as far as I can see, it does not really spend—or it does not suggest that it has fantastic ambition in terms of sport.

[200] It is one of the few, if not the only, local authority in Wales that does not have a support scheme for young elite athletes. So, if you want to play in the Welsh Institute of Sport where it costs you nearly £9 an hour for a court, which is extremely expensive, you have to find that yourselves, whereas if you go to Flintshire and other parts of north Wales, there is a gold card system all along that corridor. That means that if you are a promising player you will be given a gold card that allows you to book facilities.

[201] It is the same along the A470 corridor. Mid Glamorgan, Monmouthshire and Torfaen

all have schemes, and they are not cities. They all have schemes that support aspiring talented young people. In Cardiff, you need to have a few quid in your bank account if you are going to be a promising sportsperson. I do not understand that, to be honest. Given that I do not have the information, and because I have never been involved in the debate, I do sometimes scratch my head and ask, ‘Why has Cardiff not had more of these things over the years?’. Interestingly, I heard someone from the local authority saying that a bid would be made for the Commonwealth Games—I cannot remember which games. Why has it taken so long?

[202] Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham have all hosted major events, so it would seem to me that these cities—and London of course—are all places that seem to embrace sport and want to have a myriad of high-level sporting activities. Cardiff does not seem to do anything. I know that we have football and rugby. Looking ahead at the next two or three years, I cannot see much that leads me to say, ‘That is going to be fantastic. I really am looking forward to that’.

[203] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you think it is a mixture of money and lack of ambition, or is it—

[204] **Sandy Mewies:** Will you go through the Chair please, Eleanor?

[205] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, I do beg your pardon. I will go through the Chair, of course,

[206] **Sandy Mewies:** I ask you to be brief, Mr O’Neill, because I have eight minutes in which to get other Members in, before I draw this to a conclusion.

[207] **Mr O’Neill:** It is hard to escape the fact that there is perhaps a lack of ambition. We are perhaps a little bit too inward looking and not outward looking. I do not know the answer to that. However, from an observer’s point of view, ever since the day I came here, I have not seen the same hunger and ambition for top sport in Wales as you see in other places.

[208] **Eleanor Burnham:** Thank you, Chair.

[209] **Sandy Mewies:** Bethan has the next question.

[210] **Bethan Jenkins:** You referred to the A470 corridor. I played badminton when I was growing up in Merthyr and, in the beginning, there were enough trainers and enough young people taking part. However, the system gradually changed; the local sports centre would organise trade fairs and car boot sales, which would take the facility from the young people in the area. I feel passionately about that because lots of young people were stopped from playing badminton because local authorities did not consider it a priority. I wanted to say that just because you are here.

[211] You mention in your paper that making badminton an Olympic sport, and perhaps having the sport on a British level, has taken you forward. You say that Wales needs to be more honest about its sport; do you see that Wales is perhaps not giving the sport the same priority as the other devolved nations or taking account of what the UK Government is doing in this regard? What do you see as a definitive way forward for Wales and for badminton?

[212] **Mr O’Neill:** That is a great question. In the last five years, we became partners with Scotland and England in trying to develop new coaching awards and being engaged at the Olympic level and in various committees, and so on. We sat around a table with people who had far more resource than us and pretended that we could hold our own. That was stupid, but we just did not seem to have the courage to say, ‘Look, we really cannot do that, so what we are going to do is this’. We welcomed the broad principles of everything that was being talked about, and we suggested that we could do those things. However, we could not do it at that

level. We should have said, 'We do not have £100,000 to throw at a certain project, but you do, and good for you, so you can lead.' We pretended that we had that somehow and sat around for a long time. However, it reached breaking point about two years ago because I felt that I had to sit in front of these people and say, 'I am not going to do that and I do not intend to do that, because I cannot do it'. It is not that we are stupid or that we in Wales cannot do these things; we can. We can make an enormous intellectual contribution to the process, but we cannot give you 15 people to go out into the streets and do it. Therefore, I think that our contribution has changed because of our resource.

[213] Intellectually, I think that we are the equal of all of these people—from England and Scotland. Therefore, I think that our partnerships have helped us in the past two years. However, the thing that holds us back, and will continue to hold us back, is the fact that we do not have the same resource. They can drive things forward, but that is not always a good thing.

10.50 a.m.

[214] Do not get me wrong—if I had £20 million tomorrow, I would probably end up in as big a mess as when we had nothing. There is a psychology to funding. You have to have the right levels of funding. We have done wonders with not a lot of money and it would not take an awful lot more to see Welsh badminton on a steep upward curve. So I do not want £5 million. I think that some of our partners in England and Scotland have lost the plot big time, because they feel the need to spend that which is given to them and, if you have that attitude, you end up buying 10 iPods when you only need one.

[215] **Sandy Mewies:** Just to let you know, I am going to draw this session to an end, come what may, at the right time.

[216] **Bethan Jenkins:** Is there no way you could have a syndicate and work with the other countries so that if they have more money than you they could perhaps share that resource with you?

[217] **Mr O'Neill:** They will not do that, but they do share ideas and resource in that sense. They will not give us money, but they share resource. We have a very fruitful relationship with Scotland, and with England in particular. It is the lead in most of the things that we do. I think that that is only because we are open and honest about the money that we do not have. I think that they can see that within Wales there is an intellect and a desire to be as good as anybody. The fact that we do not have money does not mean that we are the poor partner at the table—far from it.

[218] **Joyce Watson:** You have talked about a lot of things today. Do you think that there are any lessons that we might take forward in terms of the recommendations, in particular, that we can make as a committee to the Welsh Government?

[219] **Mr O'Neill:** Wales needs to decide what it is in terms of sport. That is the crux of the matter for me. It would be good if a message was sent out that this country loves every sport and will fund every sport to the best of its ability. That is not going to be £200 million next year, but even if there is not a lot of money to go around, I think that if it did the same thing as we did in saying to people, 'We do not have the resource but we are passionate about this and we will take part in it, we will drive it forward intellectually', that would send a real message out to the country. It needs to get to the local authorities, which we are going to start engaging with this year. It will be interesting in a year's time to see whether I will be able to say, 'I have been around all 22 of these local authorities, and they are all passionate about sport' or 'Five of them are passionate about sport and the rest of them could not care less'. I do not have a feeling for that right now, but I worry sometimes when people start putting

departments together and putting sport together with health. It has nothing to do with health. Health and a good lifestyle for the population is just that; sport is something different. If you start pushing those together and giving them five quid and letting them fight among themselves over spending it, then you are going to end up between a rock and a hard place. So, I would love to see Wales send that message out loud and clear in the coming months.

[220] **Sandy Mewies:** I will just draw this session to an end. In your paper, you referred to making badminton an Olympic sport and the Great Britain relationship and how this has taken you forward. In what ways has it improved matters for the sport of badminton? I thank you very much indeed for the evidence that you have given us today and for your paper. You have been very clear, and you have raised some important issues. You will be able to make corrections relating to matters of accuracy when you get the transcript.

[221] I am afraid that I have to ask for a brief answer to my question, but I would also like to ask you whether there is anything else that you would like to mention, or whether you have any further recommendations. If you cannot think of any now, you can send them into the clerk by e-mail; you would be welcome to do that. So, to draw this to a conclusion, are there any further recommendations that you wish to make and do you have any comments about badminton becoming an Olympic sport?

[222] **Mr O'Neill:** My recommendation would be that I would want to see Wales engaged in partnerships in every sport in all the world's continents. Never mind about the money. If the money is not there, do not get hamstrung by that, but show our ambition. We should speak to people with our heads held high and come back with whatever ideas we can take from others. If we can put those into action here and make our product in every sport better than it is now, who knows where that could lead. That is my overwhelming recommendation for all of us. Let us make the dragon roar.

[223] **Sandy Mewies:** What about the Olympics? How have things improved for badminton?

[224] **Mr O'Neill:** All of a sudden you are sitting around a table with people who, prior to that, would have walked past you, would have had nothing to do with you and with whom you would have no conversation whatsoever. All of a sudden, you can speak to the best and most successful people in the world, gain information, gain ideas and become energised and that allows you to come back and look at your five quid and spend it better. That is what the Olympic movement has done. It has put all sorts of people around a table who were previously strangers—in fact, some were enemies. So the Olympic movement has been a phenomenal vehicle for bringing people together and Wales has benefited tremendously from that.

[225] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you. Once again, if there is anything that you think of that you would like to add, please do not hesitate to send that on to the clerk. Thank you very much indeed for your paper and your evidence today.

[226] **Mr O'Neill:** It was my pleasure.

10.56 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[227] **Sandy Mewies:** I will now move a motion to exclude the public from the meeting for items 3 and 4 to allow the committee to consider its forward work programme and the report of the inquiry into youth justice and the experience of Welsh children in the secure state. I move that

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

[228] I see that we are in agreement.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.57 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.57 a.m.