

Speech: Tracey Crouch speech at LGA Sport and Physical Activity conference

Thank you for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to speak on an issue that I know many of you here share my passion for – sport and physical activity and how we can all collectively work together to tackle inactivity and the associated problems.

I want to start by paying tribute to the work of local authorities in delivering sports and leisure services.

I recognise that this is a difficult time for Local Authorities and that tough decisions are having to be made in terms of services delivered due to challenging financial circumstances.

The vast majority of sporting activity in this country is delivered at a local level and it is extremely important that this support continues.

But I also know that many of you will argue on a regular basis with your finance directors as to why investment in sport and leisure is needed at a time when every other directorate may have what seems like a stronger hand.

The truth is that investment in leisure not only can reduce the burden on more expensive budgets but it also builds and bonds communities, and helps tackle social problems, hidden or otherwise, that can quietly eat away at the core of society until it is too late.

It is for this reason that when I looked at rewriting the Sports Strategy we looked to local government and DCLG first to get initial thoughts. How you deliver what we wanted for the next ten years was going to be key. When I did media straight after one of the recurring questions was but government has cut local authority budgets...but my answer was always good local authorities get it. They get why this is important. And yes of course it may be delivered differently across the country, that is what local government is about, but not tackling inactivity by not providing sport and leisure services in an accessible and affordable way only stores up more expensive problems for councils down the road.

Your agenda today deals with much of this so I won't repeat what they will say and instead outline some of the key points from the Sports Strategy, two years old next week.

The Sports Strategy was not about getting the active more active. Instead it stressed the importance of getting the inactive, active, and set out a new vision for a successful and active sporting nation.

It marked a big shift in the way we think about promoting, supporting and investing in sport and physical activity. It emphasised that we as a government, and a country, need to think more broadly about the benefits that getting active can bring.

We set out 5 key outcomes that we want to strive towards and that we want to see delivered in return for government support and investment. These were: * physical wellbeing; * mental wellbeing; * individual development; * social and community development; and * economic development.

I'm committed to making sure that these outcomes drive everything we do, and I'm pleased with how government and the sport and physical activity sector has responded to the challenge so far.

So what have we achieved?

On physical wellbeing Sport England has committed to spending at least a quarter of its total budget on tackling inactivity.

Sport England will be devoting much of its focus to supporting those groups who have been traditionally underrepresented to get more active.

For example, their Active Ageing Fund will invest up to £10 million into projects that help inactive older people get active.

Their Tackling Inactivity and Economic Disadvantage Fund is investing £3 million to support inactive people from lower socio-economic groups.

And their Tackling Inactivity in Colleges programme will invest £5 million in 49 colleges across England to help students be more active.

We've sought to tackle what people often feel is an artificial distinction between sport and physical activity. Not everyone likes the idea of playing sport. It provides an automatic barrier to many either because they think it is about getting sweaty or muddy or uber competitive. Or maybe people think they are too old for sport. Or not interested in team activities. But physical activity is different. Take what many of you already invest in – the health walks. I went on one locally and not a single person thought they were doing sport but through their hour long walk they were certainly doing something active and their physical well being was vastly improved as a consequence.

What matters is that people are getting active in a way that suits them and that makes them more likely to continue being active in future.

Mental wellbeing, the second outcome we are aiming to achieve with our strategy, is just as important as physical wellbeing.

And funding is already going to organisations that show they can best deliver this outcome, for example Sport England have invested a significant amount of government and National Lottery funding in mental health projects such as Mind's Get Set to Go programme.

Get Set to Go has supported over 3,500 people to become active in local communities, and trained over 300 coaches and leaders in mental health awareness for sport and physical activity.

We encourage sports and mental health organisations to continue to work

together to drive work in this area, improving mental health through sport and physical activity and changing lives for the better.

In terms of the third and fourth outcomes of our strategy, the impact sport and physical activity can have on individual and community development is significant.

We know there is a great deal of excellent work going on locally to demonstrate the impact of sport and physical activity.

I have seen the results first hand visiting a number of projects across the country which are using physical activity and sport to bring communities together and engage those who are less likely to be active.

For example I recently visited a project in Milton Keynes called MK SNAP, which is using sport and physical activity to help those with learning difficulties. Activities like yoga are really making a difference to improve the quality of the participants' lives.

I have visited Active Norfolk's Mobile Me project focusing on over 65s. It is designed to address barriers to participation identified by this age group, and take physical activity interventions into sheltered housing and residential care homes.

I've also been to Crawley Old Girls, a female football development group organised by the Crawley Town Community Foundation and the Football League Trust Female Football Development Programme.

Weekly sessions are held for women aged 40 and over, who have an interest and passion for football and who may not have had the opportunity to participate before.

And in Worcester I met Disability Sport Worcester, who specialise in creating and running sporting events, clubs and activities for children and adults with disabilities.

Of course, sport is also a significant contributor to the UK economy – and economic impact is the fifth of our key outcomes I referred to earlier. I see you have an agenda item later today about how sport can boost the visitor economy. I can't stay for the session but I can give you a little nationwide taster...

In the UK, sport was valued at £35 billion in terms of Gross Value Added in 2015.

And as well as major events, grassroots sport contributes hugely too. People who follow sporting trends and buy the latest gear or purchase gym memberships also play their part.

It is important that we continue to build and capitalise on the economic growth of the sector.

However, there is still plenty of work to do in order to fully implement all

of the actions set out in Sporting Future and the role for Local Authorities in delivering sport provision will continue to be crucial.

Local Authorities are the biggest public sector investor in sport and physical activity, spending over £1bn a year.

Your understanding and knowledge of communities is vital in targeting opportunities to encourage participation and designing services to suit.

You also have responsibilities that span wider policy areas which can have a significant impact on the physical activity of the local population, including management of rights of way, parks and other green spaces.

With increasingly devolved funding and opportunities for place based working we are keen to see innovative ways of engaging communities in sport and physical activity.

We must make sure that all investment into sporting and leisure facilities is well considered and provides an offer that is demand-based and led by the needs of the customer. We are working closely with Sport England and ukactive on their proposal to co-locate community services with sport and leisure facilities to encourage more people to participate in sport and physical activity.

I am keen that we continue to drive the development of local solutions to inactivity, with ideas like this.

With this in mind, it is my great pleasure to announce that 12 areas have now been confirmed as the Sport England Local Delivery Pilots. The full list is being published this morning but includes Bradford, Essex, Doncaster and Withernsea.

The aim of these pilots is to trial new and innovative ways of increasing participation in sport and physical activity at the local level and to make sure that this increase is sustained over time.

It's about whole system change involving all local agencies, including small third sector organisations that work in the heart of these often disadvantaged communities we need to reach.

Sport England will be investing up to 100 million pounds over the next four years across these 12 areas to support this ambition. They will also be investing staff resource in working with the pilot areas.

This is going to be a huge challenge. We know that too often, investment in a particular project or place can yield a short term result but that as soon as the money stops, the gains can fade.

We want these pilots to be different.

We must make sure that we learn from the pilots, that we scale up what works in other areas and that we learn from what does not work so well.

The areas chosen as pilots include a good mix of urban, rural and coastal areas and a good geographic spread. This is deliberate, and will help the sharing and scaling up of learning across different areas.

This is a long term programme and Sport England will be working closely with these areas over the next four years.

We are not going to see results overnight, however this is a very important step in the right direction and Sport England will be monitoring progress carefully, as will I.

So in conclusion I would like to again take this opportunity to thank all of you for the huge part you already play in getting the nation active and I look forward to working with you to ensure Sporting Future is fully implemented and embedded in every community across the country. It is not going to all work overnight but with the right strategic direction in place and the will and enthusiasm of people like you I genuinely believe we can deliver the outcome of creating a fitter healthier nation for years to come.