

Written evidence submitted by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Sport and Recreation Alliance (the Alliance) is the representative body for the sport and recreation sector, with a diverse membership of more than 320 national and local organisations across the sport and recreation and charity sectors. As the voice of the sector, we work with Government, policy makers and the media to make sure grassroots sport and recreation grows and thrives, and launched a new four-year strategy in April 2017. Working with children and young people has been prioritised within this as one of our four strategic objectives, and our members are increasingly calling for recognition of, and subsequent investment into, sport and physical activity for public health.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Alliance welcomes progress to date around the *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action* (the Plan), but believes that the recommendations pertaining to physical activity have stalled following the publication of the Plan in August 2016.
- 2.2 We applaud that the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) has supported investment into school sport, enabling Government to double the Primary PE and Sport Premium (PESP), however this has only been committed up to 2020 and should be extended.
- 2.3 Government has focused policy action on calorie reduction programmes, with recommendations intended to drive increased levels of physical activity appearing to have been largely side-lined. This should be urgently reviewed by Government. We recognise that reducing calorie intake must lie at the heart of a successful strategy, but calorie reduction should not be the sole focus for an effective childhood intervention. Government must work to ensure that children and young people establish an active lifestyle from their early years with physical activity recommendations prioritised and taken forward. As stated in the Plan, there is strong evidence that suggests that regular physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits for children^[1] (Start Active, Stay Active 2011) and is a vital part of successful long-term weight management. Physical activity must be a part of the solution to the childhood obesity crisis, particularly in establishing healthy, balanced and sustainable habit from an early age.

3. What progress has been made with the measures contained within the Plan?

- 3.1 We have chosen to comment on select actions detailed within the Plan, specifically those relating to the development or delivery of sport and physical activity opportunities:
- 3.2 ***Introducing a soft drinks industry levy***
- 3.2.1 We welcome the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL), and recognise that the greatest progress has been made here, with the introduction of the Levy enabling Government

to double the Primary PE and Sport Premium (PESP) from £160m to £320m per year from the start of the 2017/18 academic year.

- 3.2.2 This is positive, but we have concerns that these allocated funds have not been spent effectively to date, nor have sufficient accountability measures been implemented. Expenditure must be targeted with clear objectives and transparent impact reporting, and more rigorous accountability measures should be a priority to ensure comprehensive interrogation of PESP spending decisions.
- 3.2.3 The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the [Youth Sports Trust](#) (YST) and the [Association for Physical Education](#) (AfPE) to develop and release guidance for schools on evidencing the impact of this funding, however advice from DfE around the effective deployment of PESP has been limited. Schools have been hard-pressed to target expenditure effectively and there are real concerns that optimal outcomes will not be realised with the existing accountability measures. In theory, OFSTED both assess how effectively schools and practitioners use the PESP and measure its impact on pupils' levels of activity, however we have concerns that this is not sufficiently rigorous to incentivise efficient expenditure. OFSTED should receive greater support from Government to manage this.
- 3.2.4 Furthermore, the doubled PESP funding has not been committed beyond 2020, and there has been no clear indication from Government whether this will be maintained beyond the current spending review period. If Government is to meaningfully invest in sport and physical activity to support children and young people in developing an active lifestyle, spending must not be short-term – investment must be sustained to deliver meaningful social impact.
- 3.2.5 We would also draw the Committee's attention to Government's reduction of the Healthy Pupils Capital Fund (HPCF) in July 2017. The HPCF was introduced in February 2017 as new funding to boost school facilities and healthy lifestyles, but just a few months later Government significantly reduced funding from £415m per year to £100m per year. We recognise that HPCF is funded by SDIL, but Government taking the decision to reallocate funding committed to HPCF into core schools' budget is confusing. Investment into capital infrastructure to support a healthy, active lifestyle at school is urgently required.
- 3.2.6 We are mindful that SDIL's effectiveness in reducing sugar levels within soft drinks is a positive step towards tackling obesity, however recent policy decisions with regard to physical activity and school sport call into question how genuine this commitment is. We recognise that the Plan was the start of the conversation and not the final word, but we now call on Government to consider whether a wider levy could be applied to other food and drink products, with the proceeds ringfenced for physical activity, health and wellbeing initiatives.
- 3.2.7 The Alliance has, along with several organisations across the sport sector, proactively engaged with Government to develop guidelines for responsible sponsorship arrangements with HFSS brands and we look forward to engaging further on this important issue.
- 3.3 ***Helping all children to enjoy an hour of physical activity every day***
- 3.3.1 Government has not appeared to take any direct action towards this, and has pushed responsibility onto individual schools and sector bodies such as YST and AfPE as they developed base guidance for schools around effective deployment of PESP. However,

as referenced in 3.2.3, our concerns regarding the effectiveness of PESP accountability measures calls into question how meaningful this action is.

3.3.2 The lack of progress towards the introduction of a new Healthy Schools Rating Scheme as detailed in 3.5 compounds this issue. The Plan reiterates that physical activity will be a key part of the scheme, but Government has appeared to side-line this programme over the past 12 months.

3.3.3 Furthermore, Government has provided no tangible guidance to networks beyond the school system to help children and young people engage in 30 minutes of physical activity outside of the school day. The Plan looks to parents and carers to facilitate this 30 minutes of activity, seemingly with no support, but pays no heed to the high-quality grass roots programmes which are well-rooted in local communities across the UK. Government should work with local authorities and the County Sport Partnership Network (CSPN) to support effective engagement around the school day. Government and local authorities working together to ensure that school sport facilities are available outside of the school day will be key to this.

3.3.4 We recognise that a review of the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines around recommended physical activity levels is ongoing, but Government must not delay in taking action to support schools and local communities in expanding opportunities for children and young people to be physically active for at least an hour per day. If properly publicised and widely understood by key clinicians and members of the public, CMO guidelines provide a key opportunity to drive long-term behaviour change across the UK.

3.4 ***Improving the coordination of quality sport and physical activity programmes for schools***

3.4.1 We recognise the strides made by the CSPN and London Sport to develop a pilot Supplier Hub to help schools research and identify high-quality service providers who are able to support their delivery of increased sport and physical activity programmes across and beyond the school day. The pilot is an example of tangible progress towards the action laid out in the Plan and their work should be commended.

3.4.2 We welcome Sport England's launch of the £40 million Families Fund and their new strategic focus on outcomes, but it is difficult to assess the extent to which this funding will support tackling childhood obesity. It remains a new fund, and with awards not yet formally announced, the first outcomes and impact of this investment will not be known for some time.

3.4.3 The Department for Transport's (DfT) Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy was launched in 2017 and states one objective as being to increase the percentage of children aged 5-10 that usually walk to school up to 55% by 2025. That being said, the intended 6% increase across an 11-year period is far from an ambitious target, perhaps as only a fraction of the investment committed to support DfT's strategic plan will target children and young people directly. Government is unlikely to meet its overall objective of reducing childhood obesity without sustained investment into physical activity from all government departments.

3.5 ***Creating a new healthy rating scheme for primary schools***

3.5.1 From what we understand, the Healthy Schools Rating Scheme is yet to be implemented. The Department for Education has suggested that there was a tender

process established in January 2017 but that this was halted in spring 2017 and has not been picked up again.

- 3.5.2 The DfE reassured the Alliance that the rating scheme was being reviewed and that information would be shared soon, however this was back in November 2017. This is an example of the need for greater transparency and communication from Government, with an innovative scheme appearing to be side-lined and little information being made public.
- 3.5.3 Furthermore, information on OFSTED's thematic review on obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in schools has also not been forthcoming. A response to a Freedom of Information request from DfE in October 2017 suggested that the scope of the review has been agreed, with intent to publish a report in 2018. However, no official confirmation from Government has been published. Government must take steps to improve communication of all outcomes from the *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action*.

3.6 ***Supporting early years settings***

- 3.6.1 The Plan references the importance of children's early years for their development, but focuses action upon guidelines for dietary recommendations rather than upon physical activity. The latter must be the priority at early years to ensure young children establish an active lifestyle through active play and wider opportunities to be physically active.
- 3.6.2 Government did publish new healthy eating guidance in November 2017, however Government's reference to the CMO guidelines for physical activity in the updated Early Years Foundation Stage Framework appears to be largely superficial^[2]. Signposting to the guidelines should be prioritised within this early years guidance framework if Government is to meaningfully support children and young people's engagement with physical activity in their early years.

4. **What should be the priorities for further action by the Government?**

- 4.1 There is a lack of coordinated thinking when it comes to nutrition and physical activity. Government must bring physical activity interventions up to a par with their efforts around calorie reduction programmes, rather than seemingly side-lining initiatives which address children and young peoples' levels of physical activity.
- 4.2 Extending the PESP beyond 2020 to the end of the current Parliament in 2022 is also vital, and should be the priority. At present, Government has given the Alliance little confidence in their longer-term commitment to helping get children more physically active, and the short-term nature of this doubled funding only serves to increase uncertainty across the system.
- 4.3 There is an urgent need for Government to give teachers the tools they need to spend PESP effectively and to provide better guidance to schools. As the Premium is only in effect until 2020, it is difficult for schools to be able to use this money for long-term investments into schoolsport which will ultimately help address rising childhood obesity rates. Furthermore, OFSTED must be given greater resources to overhaul the depth and breadth of their assessment of schools' effective deployment of the PESP and this must be clearly communicated to all schools in receipt of PESP funding to ensure an appropriate response from stakeholders across the school sport system.

- 4.4 The Healthy Schools Rating Scheme must be restarted by the Department for Education. The seeming abandonment of this action more than a year ago is unacceptable and the distinct lack of public information on progress around this scheme must be rectified.
- 4.5 Government should also look to build upon the success of SDIL by considering further levies on high-fat, high-sugar and/or processed foods. SDIL has demonstrated how such a levy can drive product reformulation by manufacturers, but the time for decisive action on wider food and drink products is now.
- 4.6 Early years interventions must be refocused away from calorie reduction and diet management alone, towards a more comprehensive solution that includes physical activity. Children's first five years are the most formative in their cognitive, personal and social development. Engagement in active play and informal physical activity opportunities from an early age plays a crucial role in children and young people developing an active lifestyle for life, and Government must prioritise accordingly.
- 4.7 Furthermore, Government's continued commitment to cross-government working is welcome, but the Committee should ask if this ambition has genuinely been met. The Inter-Ministerial Group for School Sport brings together Ministers from across a range of departments, but limited progress appears to have been made. There is no clarity as to the nature of this Group's discussions, and Government must remember that actions speak louder than words.

5. **Conclusion**

- 5.1 *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action* may be the start of the conversation, but Government has the final word in taking these recommendations forward, and indeed if they want to replace the Plan with an updated version. Nevertheless, the Committee must understand how urgent it is that the physical activity recommendations within the Plan are taken forward as a priority.
- 5.2 Government must understand that focusing on calorie reduction is only half the answer. Establishing a physically active lifestyle for children and young people from their earliest years is the key to long-term lifestyle change across society, and it is essential that this is recognised and acted upon.
- 5.3 We would be happy to provide the Committee with any further information with regards to our submission to the inquiry if required.

April 2018

[1] Start Active, Stay Active (2011) - www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countries-chief-medical-officers

[2] Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017), p.8
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2