



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Inquiry into Participation in Sport and
Physical Activity: Briefing from the
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

15 April 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)

Lord Browne

Mr Billy Leonard

Mr Kieran McCarthy

Mr Raymond McCartney

Mr David McClarty

Miss Michelle McIlveen

Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Nelson McCausland) Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Ciaran Mee)

Mr Philip Spotswood) Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Colin Watson)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

Good morning to the team. I welcome the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Nelson McCausland, who is joined by three senior officials from the Department; Colin Watson, head of sports branch; Ciaran Mee from sports branch; and Philip Spotswood, who is the deputy principal statistician. Minister, please make an opening statement after which I will invite members to ask questions.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland):

Thank you, Chairman. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a presentation as part of its inquiry into adult participation in sport and physical activity.

I have been following the Committee's deliberations on the matter with considerable interest, and I am aware of many of the presentations that it has received. I am also aware of the extensive evidence gathering that the Committee has undertaken as part of its inquiry; in particular, its recent stakeholder consultation forum, which was held on 25 March 2010. I greatly welcome the Committee's interest in adult participation in sport and physical activity as it is an issue that deeply concerns me, as Minister with responsibility for sport and recreation in Northern Ireland.

In my foreword to 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation', I identified the need to halt the evident decline in adult participation in sport during the past 10 years as a key early priority for the strategy. Beyond that, and within the lifetime of the strategy, I have set a target to increase participation rates from the baseline that will be established in 2011. It is an ambitious goal.

As I point out in the foreword, according to the latest published evidence, Northern Ireland has one of the lowest rates of sports participation in the United Kingdom, and that rate is falling. The Committee will know from the evidence that it has gathered as part of its inquiry that the causes of low participation are multifaceted. There is no quick fix and no one-size-fits-all solution. Addressing the problem requires commitment, resources, vision and the collaboration of all. In short, and, again, as I said in the foreword, it requires a sea change in attitudes and culture.

The obvious questions are: why is this necessary? What is to be gained from improving participation rates in sport? Are there not more pressing issues? One can start to answer those questions by pointing to some of the presentations that have already been made to the Committee as part of its inquiry. The Committee has rightly uncovered, and, indeed, often focused on, compelling evidence of the vital contribution that physical activity makes to health and well-being. In that respect, I note that the British Medical Association, in its presentation to the Committee at the beginning of March, identified sport, as a form of physical activity, to be one of the most practical and beneficial areas to look at.

The Sport Matters strategy puts the position very starkly. It recognises the link between

regular lifelong participation in sport and improved mental and physical health. It quotes evidence from a variety of sources which suggest that, unless we act to address the problem of physical inactivity across our population, we will, in all likelihood, face an obesity epidemic with potentially enormous ramifications for health services and life expectancy in Northern Ireland.

In addition, there are the problems resulting from mental ill health. The Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health estimates that the cost of working days lost to mental ill health in Northern Ireland may be as much as £125 million a year. However, research undertaken as part of the development of the Sport Matters strategy suggests that sport and physical activity can contribute positively to mental health, through improving self-esteem, reducing anxiety and combating depression.

For all those reasons, I feel that it is right that the 11 participation targets in the Sport Matters strategy deliberately and purposefully aim to achieve improvements in sports participation rates that fit with the UK chief medical officers' recommendations in relation to healthy physical activity. For adults, the recommendation is currently 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity at least five times a week. I assure you, we did very well on that front recently, when the lift in DCAL broke down and was switched off. We had to climb nine flights of stairs. I was able to get to level 6 before I had to stop, which was not too bad.

Critical though the health issues are; it is important that we do not lose sight of the other significant benefits that well-structured sporting and physical recreation activity brings to society and to the individual. For example, sport is a net financial contributor to the economy, and its economic value is firmly established. Recent figures suggest that spending on sport contributes approximately £450 million to the Northern Ireland economy, or 2% of the gross domestic product. Activity tourism alone contributes around £30 million a year. There are an estimated 14,000 people employed in sport and physical recreation industries in Northern Ireland. Sport also contributes significantly to local communities. For example, sports volunteers make up the largest part of our voluntary sector. As such, sport has the potential to serve as a key vehicle for promoting community development, good relations, and the broader shared and better future agenda to which the Northern Ireland Executive are so committed.

In addition to the wider economic and social benefits, there is considerable evidence to suggest that participation in sport can contribute to children's improved educational performance

and to raising their personal self-esteem. Last night, there was an item on the news about recent research in America, which strongly reinforced the point about the benefit that participation in sport brings in improving educational performance. It has also been frequently proven to be a highly useful tool in other personal development strategies, such as those aimed at combating crime and re-engaging marginalised young people. Apart from everything else, despite its present difficulties, sport remains an intrinsic part of Northern Ireland's culture. It is, and should be, fun and fulfilling in its own right. Interest spans the entire community, and there is evidence that people here would participate more if barriers could be removed and the right opportunities provided.

As Minister, I want to play my part in ensuring that those opportunities are provided. Sport Matters emphasises the importance of improving opportunities for participation, by improving sporting choices and offering more multi-sports options. That requires us to continue to look at ways in which our larger and better known sports can be supported and made more accessible to the whole community. However, it also needs to be recognised that not everyone will wish to take part in those particular sports. Therefore, there is an obligation on us to do what we can to widen the range of sporting choices available. For example, there are 80 recognised governing bodies of sport active in Northern Ireland. That represents a huge potential opportunity and choice to our population. One of my priorities therefore is to look at what can be done to better exploit that opportunity and thus create greater scope for individuals to find and take part in the sports that best suit them. In my view, that is a key element in driving up participation rates.

Obviously, none of that can be delivered without effective and properly-targeted investment. Members will also be aware of the current budgetary environment. However, contrary to some suggestions circulating publicly, I am pleased to say that I have been able to use Sport Matters to make the case for not just protecting existing investment in sport, but to place it on an even stronger financial footing than in the previous year. Specifically, I have secured a £2 million increase in Sport NI's resource budget compared to 2009-2010 and a £7 million increase in the capital budget above that originally indicated in the comprehensive spending review for 2008-2011.

As Sport Matters makes clear, neither DCAL nor Sport NI has the capacity to singlehandedly deliver the change needed. Success is dependent on clear leadership, co-ordination and effective partnership working involving all interests and stakeholders. As Minister, I intend to provide that

leadership and ensure effective collaboration. With that in mind, I recently established a Sport Matters monitoring group, which I will chair and will seek to oversee the implementation of Sport Matters. I hope to hold the first meeting of that group on 13 May. It will bring together senior representatives of Departments and agencies responsible for sport, health, education, social development, local government and the environment. Under my chairmanship, it will ensure that the buy-in needed from all partners and stakeholders is secured. It will approve, monitor and evaluate detailed action plans and ensure their implementation. Important though that is, I believe that in order to succeed, buy-in must go beyond monitoring groups and meetings.

As the Committee will be aware, Sport Matters estimates that an additional £134 million will be needed over the next 10 years to achieve all the aims of the strategy. It also recognises that no one organisation can singlehandedly meet that shortfall. All public, private and voluntary stakeholders have a role to play. However, it is important for central government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to set the example. If the Executive are to fulfil their commitments to sport and physical recreation in Sport Matters and deliver the wider benefits, Ministers and Departments need to look imaginatively at ways of supporting each other practically and financially. Discussions on that subject are ongoing between my officials and their counterparts in the Department of Education and in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Moreover, I recently wrote to the Minister of Education to ask whether she is willing to meet me and Sport Northern Ireland to discuss ways in which we could jointly improve collaboration in areas such as physical education (PE), school sport and community sport. I await her response.

Assembly Committees have an important part to play in encouraging greater collaboration on the issue in government and between Departments. This Committee and those that deal with health, education and social development have a role to play in that respect. Under Sport Matters, I am committed to publishing periodic progress reports on implementation. I am also happy to share those reports with the Committee and to arrange for it to be briefed on them. Through Sport Matters, I want to not only preserve our sporting culture but to cultivate it and strengthen it now and for the future.

In short, I want Northern Ireland to realise the vision of Sport Matters, which is a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport. It is huge challenge to deliver that vision. There are no easy answers, and there will be many obstacles along the way. However, the prize of a healthier,

more prosperous, more educated, more equal, more fulfilled and more peaceful community is too valuable to lose. It is our chance to show that Northern Ireland has truly come of age.

The Chairperson:

Sport NI told the Committee that £700 million will be required to implement the strategy for sport over the next 10 years. What is the Department's view on the likely availability of such funding? Does the Department intend to prioritise the strategy for sport over other business areas in the coming years?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Officials might want to comment on the precise nature of that £700 million. However, it is not all new money; much of it is already in the system. The shortfall — if it can be described as such — is £130 million over 10 years. However, that will come from a variety of sources and not simply from the Department. We consider the issue to be cross-departmental and believe that it not only involves central government, but local government and other sectors also. The additional £130 million that we will require over the next 10 years will come from a range of sources.

Mr Colin Watson (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

That is the case. There is an opportunity to raise funding through central government, local government, the private sector, the voluntary sector and sponsorship. Sport Matters considers how to maximise funding from various sources. Furthermore, Sport Matters is not solely about participation in sport; it is about healthier lifestyles and physical activity. We want to encourage a culture change and healthier lifestyles through whatever funding we can get.

Mr K Robinson:

I thank the Minister and his officials for the presentation. Minister, I am conscious that there is almost a divergence with respect to what you are attempting to achieve through the various agencies. The emphasis seems to be on sport. Physical activity is part of the conundrum too. For example, I am involved with the Newtownabbey Way, and a cycle and walking path has opened recently from Whiteabbey through the centre of Newtownabbey. When it was officially opened, I was amazed to discover that there is already a 30,000 footfall over one of our bridges. That represents a significant number of people who are not engaged in sport but who are engaged in physical activity. That costs about £1.5 million. I wonder about value for money and whether we have taken the correct path.

Furthermore, the purpose of this inquiry is to get the people we most want to get involved in physical activity to keep up with the Chief Medical Officer's advice of participating in exercise five times a week for 30 minutes, yet most of them live in areas that are inundated with fast food outlets. There is a mixed message here. As the lead Department, will the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) consider an active advertising campaign, perhaps along the lines of lines of the anti-smoking and road safety campaigns, to get that general message out to the public?

There are 80 recognised sport governing bodies: we almost have the situation in which there are a number of introverted people who are, rightly, only interested in their sport, want to see their sport expanded and get the money do so, which is fantastic. However, it seems that there is a vast reservoir of people who could be tapped into fairly quickly if their mindsets were changed through an advertising campaign. They could be encouraged to engage in physical actively locally and more regularly. Should we not try to break that barrier first?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I think that the issue you are focusing on concerns the health aspect.

Mr K Robinson:

It is physical activity.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The advertising campaign you suggest would be more the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. That is why we are working in a cross-departmental way. We are trying to bring together the different Departments so that everyone brings an area and money to the table.

Mr K Robinson:

Do you see what I am driving at? We require a change in mindsets, and if it requires the Health Department to take the lead, that is fine. However, what can you do to get more bangs for the bucks and get more people involved in physical activity?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I agree with your point that any form of regular exercise, whether formal or casual should be encouraged. However, the benefits of regular exercise are clearly best delivered and sustained in a properly structured way, rather than just casually. That is one of the reasons why sports club membership is one of the participation targets in the Sport Matters strategy.

Having said that, we recognise that there is clearly a role to be played by all of the Departments; and by local government, which is responsible for the parks that are the places where people regularly go to walk, jog and run. That is why the cross-departmental approach envisaged in the Sport Matters strategy is so important. Formal and informal types of physical activity are equally important.

Mr K Robinson:

I notice that your departmental official is emphatically nodding his head in response to what you are saying.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I am glad to hear it.

Mr K Robinson:

You have spoken about participation being informal, but I can assure you that there are groups, particularly of young ladies who have obviously got the message that they must go out and shed some weight and keep fit. They may not be wearing the same vests or walking at the same time, but it is getting harder and harder for me to walk, because I keep encountering groups of young ladies, who are much fitter than me, and cyclists who want to use the footpath at the same time as me. Those people are a resource to be tapped into, and you are preaching to the converted to a large degree.

That should be expanded across society, and those areas that seem to attract the fast food bars should be particularly targeted. If you were to go by the number and range of hot food outlets in parts of Newtownabbey you would think that some folk there cannot cook at all. We all know the dangers involved, and the Health Minister also has a role to play. However, will you consider the groups of people who engage in physical activity informally, or unstructured as you say, and how we might build on their example so that it is copied by others.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The point is well made, and there certainly is an overwhelming case for promoting all types of activity whether formal or informal. As long as people are active, they will receive the health benefits.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation, Minister. I totally admire the sentiment, as must everybody. We wish you every success in bringing the policy to fruition as early as possible. I think that I know the answer to my question, but, in view of what you said to Ken Robinson, I will ask it anyway. In Scotland, areas of responsibility for health and sport are linked in the same Department. Do the Minister and his officials believe that that would be beneficial here in getting the message across that sport and physical activity have major health benefits for everyone, and for society in general?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The reorganisation of Departments is a broader political issue. However, we can address the crossover between health and sport and recreation through good departmental co-ordination. Yesterday, some of my officials met officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education. Therefore, the cross-departmental approach is under way and will be to the fore much more in future.

Mr McCarthy:

Do you see that coming-together benefiting everyone concerned?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Although there is crossover for all of them, education, health and sport could obviously not be put into one Department. In a system such as that which we have at Stormont, the best idea is to involve all relevant Departments, as well as others with a more tangential role to play. The more Departments that bring something to the table, the better.

Lord Browne:

I thank the Minister for his presentation. It is interesting to note that you referred to minority sports. Members will agree that the three mains sports — soccer, Gaelic and rugby — get

attention and have high participation levels.

Minority sports are sometimes forgotten. However, they must be highlighted, because many people participate in them. People often approach me in my constituency in search of recognition and funding for their sports; therefore, it is an area of concern. To understand why, one need only think of the success that Northern Ireland has had in Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games in minority sports such as ice skating, shooting — Jim Shannon is no longer on this Committee — and cross-country running, as well as on the track. I would like to see our policy widened to address the needs of those minority sports. Does the Minister have anything in mind to help people who take part in them?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Minority sport is a very important area. I have found it interesting to attend a range of events over recent months in which people have demonstrated for me, or informed me about, their particular sport. Most people do not realise the range of sporting activity that there is in Northern Ireland. The fact that there are 80 sports governing bodies gives some indication of that. Moreover, some sports do not even have a governing body.

If we concentrate too much on the three main sports — football, rugby and Gaelic — there is a danger of limiting people's involvement, because none of them is their sport of choice. Doing more to make other sports available right across the Province will have a significant impact on participation levels.

I have been looking at minority sports and talking to a number of their representatives, and they need and deserve more encouragement and support. There is a danger of the larger organisations being dominant and of others being somewhat marginalised and forgotten. We must be absolutely certain that all sports get the level of support and the profile that they deserve. For instance, I was not aware of the number of Northern Ireland schools and their pupils participating in fencing at the UK School Games.

The list of governing bodies includes DanceSport Northern Ireland, and I am glad to see that the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society is also listed. The most important thing is to get people to engage in physical activity, whether that be dance or rugby. I am particularly interested in generating support for minority sports and raising their profile. They may not have the

infrastructure of larger sports or a large, well-resourced umbrella organisation, so we need to work with them in particular, and we will do so.

Lord Browne:

Many witnesses pointed out that schools are not required to offer a set amount of physical education activity per week. You referred, Minister, to the fact that you asked the Department of Education to look into the matter. I understand that, at present, there is simply a recommendation for two hours of physical recreation a week. Do you think that that is enough, or will you recommend that the Department of Education make it compulsory or increase the amount of time spent at physical activity?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The figures from the Education and Training Inspectorate indicate that around 25% of children get two hours of physical recreation a week, which means that 75% of children do not. Setting ourselves the target of getting children up to two hours a week would be a good start, and that was in the Department's mind during its conversation with, in particular, the Department of Education. We will be talking to the Department about that.

Mr Leonard:

Welcome, gentlemen. It was good to hear the Minister's presentation, which provoked many thoughts about imagination, culture change, breaking down barriers and so on. I do not mean to be negative — this morning's discussion has been positive — but I am worried about the implication that sport is better if it is structured, which is a reflection of the points made earlier and of the emphatic nod of support in that direction.

To improve health and increase participation, we must take account of the whole sports spectrum, from organised sport to casual activity, and if we do not have a catch-all arrangement that organised sport and the casual walker or cyclist can buy into, we will have difficulties.

You also said that the health aspect of sport should be emphasised in advertisements. That worries me. I appreciate the findings of the cross-departmental working group, but if we are to sell some sort of catch-all arrangement to the public, organised clubs and an individual cyclist or walker must feel part of it. I am worried that we may fall into our silos. Is it possible to sell a catch-all arrangement? I am not interested in hearing about committees. Furthermore, would the

Departments and local councils buy in fully to a single selling point?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

We must do all that we can to ensure buy-in across the board — at local government and every other level. I cannot promise anything. All that I can say is that we will do our best to ensure that there is buy-in. However, there is an onus on local authorities to ensure that they are making proper provision, and there is an onus on sports governing bodies to ensure that they are fit for purpose and doing all that they can to support the sport for which they are responsible. There is a range of participants in the partnership.

I emphasised promoting health in advertising campaigns because, bearing in mind that a large percentage — not far short of 50% — of the Budget goes on health, DCAL's budget is extremely small in comparison. Therefore, there is potential for co-operation with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. People often talk about partnership and cross-departmental working, but that is of value only if one brings something to the table. DHSSPS can bring certain things to the table. So, too, can the Department of Education, such as those facilities that are attached to schools. Billy has discussed the need to open up schools more so that their facilities can be used not only by children but by the wider community. Therefore, there is a range of possibilities.

If some misunderstanding arose over my earlier comments, I want to clarify them. I was talking about the difference between occasional activity and formal, regular activity. To achieve tangible health benefits requires regular activity. Although I might go out walking once in a while, I must confess that I am not a regular walker. I might go swimming once in a while, but I am not a regular swimmer.

Regular exercise can be taken as part of a team, such as group of ladies together. I noticed recently that one church's ladies' meeting is undertaking a walking programme over the next number of weeks. The ladies will do that as a group. Hopefully, when they get into the pattern of going walking together, they will also do it individually more regularly. Regularity of activity is of primary importance. It does not have to be done in a team, in the formal setting of a club, or whatever.

There should also be participation in activity across all age groups and sectors. For example,

elderly people and people with disabilities should be able to participate in physical activity. The other day, we talked to those involved in sport for deaf people. A range of areas needs to be covered. We must bring everyone on board.

Mr Leonard:

I want to make two supplementary points. I appreciate that clarification. We would worry if structured activity meant simply that which is provided via clubs. However, the broader definition is fine.

I accept your point about the difference between the DCAL budget and the DHSSPS budget. My worry is that he who writes the cheque has the say. The bottom line may be that a particular health aspect does not have a buy-in factor for everyone whom we want to target for participation. Therefore, as well as a budget, core ideas are needed. I am slightly concerned that there needs to be co-operation of thought, never mind co-operation of budget.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

That is why we are talking about a structured committee system that brings together all Departments, whereby we sit down regularly, talk about such matters and put out a common message. If we want to encourage participation in sport, the health argument is as good as any.

Mr Leonard:

As long as the argument does not come from a negative perspective.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I am sure that you would never imagine anything negative to come from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I have no doubt whatsoever that its views will be extremely positive. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

Minister, a number of contributors to the inquiry have said that many workplaces act as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity. For example, many workplaces do not provide changing facilities for people who want to cycle to work or exercise at lunchtime. Does DCAL provide changing facilities and bicycle storage for its staff? Given that Departments are major public sector employers, what more can DCAL do to take the lead in setting an example of how

employers can encourage their staff to do more exercise?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

My understanding is that, at present, there are no such facilities in the DCAL building. The Department does not actually own the building; it belongs to someone else. Switching off the lift is a good way in which to encourage activity. Perhaps Colin can come in on that issue.

The Chairperson:

I would like you to also bear in mind the Department's arm's-length bodies. More than 80% of its functions are devolved.

Mr Watson:

Absolutely. I believe that when we moved to the Causeway Exchange originally, there were plans to provide such facilities. It is matter for land and property services division. All kinds of funding issues, and so on, are involved. As well as that, one must take into account the facilities that are available in the area around the Causeway Exchange. Other government buildings have access to such facilities. You must also understand that, as civil servants, we have access to a fantastic sporting facility down the hill from here. It is 20 minutes up the road from Belfast, so staff can drive up and go out for a run, and it has changing and shower facilities.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

People could cycle up to it.

Mr Watson:

People could cycle up — or even run up. However, they would have to run up, exercise, take a shower, then run back down, and then take another shower, so they might be going round in circles. As civil servants, therefore, we enjoy a wide range of facilities.

Sport Northern Ireland has facilities in its building, so its staff can go out for runs. It also has changing facilities. As a Department, we encourage all employers to try to provide facilities for their workforce.

The Chairperson:

Has DCAL adopted the Bike 2 Work scheme?

Mr Watson:

I do not think that we have bought into that yet. However, we have only been in our building for around nine months. People are still trying to find their way to and from work and places to park.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The point is made.

Mr McCartney:

Thank you for your presentation, Minister. I also thank the other witnesses who contributed. I welcome the Minister's idea about cross-departmental working and the monitoring body. That is a welcome step forward.

In earlier evidence sessions, the Assembly researcher used Finland as an example of a country where there was a very noticeable increase in physical activity and a decrease in heart trouble, and so forth. It struck me that Finland has designated floodlit walking areas. In a parochial sense, despite the excellent leisure facilities in Derry city, there are no designated floodlit walking areas. The GAA and the hockey governing body talked about how some of their pitches have walking facilities around the edge of the pitches or the perimeter of the premises. When parents take their children to sporting facilities, they tend to sit in the car park and wait, rather than drive home and back again to pick them up.

To return to the point that Wallace made about schools, new leisure facilities should have designated walking areas, because walking is the easiest type of physical activity to get into. There are excellent running tracks and outdoor football pitches, so it would not cost much to install floodlights. More people walk during the summer. In the winter, they do not walk for safety reasons and owing to the weather. Are there any plans for the future?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The Finnish example and other examples of successful change in Scandinavia and elsewhere were based on recognising the need to bring about a major cultural shift in attitudes to sport and physical activity. Essentially, those countries created an environment that supported and valued physically active lifestyles, so there was a change of culture, ethos and mindset. Investment was focused on participation and taking a long-term view rather than a short-term one. In fairness, all

those issues are key elements in Sport Matters.

To come to your point about walking areas, two matters occur to me. There would certainly be a strong case to be made for something of a formal nature. It should certainly be considered. There is also an informal aspect to consider. Whether the word to use is walkability or permeability, how we design our cities is important, because design often deters people from walking. I attended a Smart Growth conference in America some years ago and came across international work on how to design cities to encourage walking. It can be about how buildings are designed so that there are more windows on to a street, which will mean that people are not deterred from walking down a street that has dark walls and no light.

In the formal setting, as you described it, yes, there is a case to be made. There is possibly a longer-term issue of changing the planners' mindset so that we make our cities and communities more walking friendly. Where we locate facilities in communities is also important. Community planning, when it comes more to the fore, will have a role to play.

Mr McCartney:

Members will be aware of the incident that occurred in Strabane the other day. Grass pitches might be used once or twice a day, but such sites would be used more often if there were walking paths around them. That additional usage might push out the people who are drinking on those sites in the evenings. Some £25,000 is to be spent on a new surface, but if imagination were to be shown in the future through the laying of, for instance, a walking path, it might offset two problems.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The more that people walk in parks, the more that others see it, and, ultimately, walking becomes the norm, and others will be encouraged to do likewise.

The Chairperson:

Has DCAL considered how it could use its other arm's-length bodies to include a focus on increasing participation levels? It could, for instance, encourage the Arts Council to fund more projects that combine the arts with physical activity, or use public libraries as a tool to promote the message that physical activity is necessary as part of a healthy lifestyle. Is DCAL using libraries and talking to Arts Council representatives?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

In the context of the 2012 Olympic Games, the Cultural Olympiad brings together culture and sport. We are starting to look at how one might bring cultural and sporting activities together.

You mentioned libraries. Libraries and other facilities are a good place to get a message out. They can be used for advertising poster campaigns and activities and for showcasing aspects of sport. We should use every vehicle that is available. However, I add this caveat: you are right when you say that 80% of our budget goes to arm's-length bodies, but, even when it is all brought together, it makes up a very small part of government. The biggest return will be achieved by bringing in other Departments, particularly the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. If we get full buy-in there, we will start to see delivery.

The Chairperson:

There are no other questions. I thank the Minister and his team for attending this morning's Committee meeting.