

Minutes of the Sport England Board meeting of 24 March 2020

The Board met remotely by videoconference.

- Members**
- Nick Bitel (Chair)
 - Natalie Ceeney (Vice-Chair)
 - Azeem Akhtar
 - Rashmi Becker
 - Chris Grant
 - Sue James
 - Andy Long
 - David Mahoney
 - Tove Okunniwa
 - Karen Pickering
- Officers**
- Mike Diaper ED – Children, Young People and Tackling Inactivity
 - Alison Donnelly, ED – Digital Marketing and Communications
 - Tim Hollingsworth, Chief Executive Officer
 - Serena Jacobs, Director-Finance (item 3)
 - Charles Johnston, ED – Property
 - Hannah Kerly, Assistant Board Secretary
 - Richard Mabbitt, Board Secretary
 - Simon Macqueen, Director – Strategy
 - Hazel McCluskey, Strat Lead – Business Transformations (items 1-2)
 - Lisa O’Keefe, ED – Insight
 - Chris Perks, ED – Local Delivery
 - Nick Pontefract, Chief Operating Officer
 - Sarah Ruane, Strategic Lead – Health (item 4)
 - Naomi Shearon, Strategic Lead – Strategy
 - Phil Smith, ED – Sport
 - Andrew Stinson, Head of Strategy management (Items 1-2)
 - Al Strang, Director – Strategic Marketing (item 4)
- Guests:**
- Anna Deignan, Head of Sport – DCMS
- Apologies:**
- Ian Cumming

1. Introduction

Chair's introductory comments

- 1.1 Nick Bitel welcomed members and officers to the meeting, which was being held remotely with Sport England's offices being closed at a time of severe restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He thanked members for their flexibility and officers for the additional effort required to prepare for and run the meeting under such circumstances

Interests

- 1.2 Nick Bitel had registered outside the meeting his appointment to the Development Commission of World Athletics.
- 1.3 No other declarations of interest were declared further to those already registered by Board members.

Minutes and matters arising

- 1.4 The Board **agreed** the Minutes of the Board meeting of 4 February 2020 (paper MB20-10) and noted decisions and actions logged at paper MB20-11.

2. Sport England response to COVID-19

Sport England COVID-19 Action Plan

- 2.1 Tim Hollingsworth spoke to paper MB20-12 which summarised actions being taken under the four main areas of Sport England's Coronavirus Action Plan: Business Continuity; Workforce Planning; Supporting the Sector; and Keeping the Nation Active. The Board:
- a) endorsed the action plan and agreed that "Supporting the Sector" and "Keeping the Nation Active" should shape Sport England's delivery in the short-to medium term.
 - b) was pleased that Sport England had worked closely and effectively with its sponsor team in DCMS to ensure that the benefits of exercise and physical activity had been properly considered in the Government's emergency decision-making. The Board thanked Anna Deignan and her team for their support and commitment.

- c) felt that that Sport England was providing a clear and authoritative narrative to stakeholders and noted that its operational response had been well received by government, and by stakeholders.
- 2.2 The Board considered the package of financial support proposed in the paper. The Board agreed that supporting those with urgent and ongoing financial challenges did not preclude incentivising and encouraging longer term change. The Board felt that the proposed measures, though reactive, nevertheless aligned with the organisations longer term strategic approach.
- 2.3 In respect of an 'Immediate Impact' phase, the Board:
- a) **agreed** to the establishment of a £20m *Hardship Fund*, envisaged as supporting a large number of smaller sectoral organisations, including those with whom Sport England did not currently have a relationship;
 - b) **agreed** to set aside £5 million for *Bespoke action for partners in difficulty* aimed at supporting closer, longer term partner organisations with specific challenges.
 - c) **agreed** to delegate authority to the executive (with Chair's sign off) the specific arrangements for managing these funds.
 - d) **agreed** that these measures be presented as a package alongside the *increased flexibilities for all funded partners* that had already been announced) and *arrangements for System partners* to be discussed later in the meeting (paragraphs 2.9-2.13 below refer);
 - e) emphasised the importance of aligning this offer with support with wider Government funding packages aimed at mitigating the economic impacts of COVID-19, noting that clarification on this was being sought by officers and DCMS officials. Given its limited budget, Sport England should not be cast as a generic funder, or funder of first resort.
- 2.4. In respect of a 'Restrictions to operations' phase, the Board:
- a) **agreed** to allocate £20million to *work with partners over the medium term to support their communities more directly*, in the interests of decreasing requests to the hardship fund and increasing the efficiency and impact of funding generally;
 - b) **agreed** to allocate £5 million towards supporting and accelerating innovation and technological solutions.
 - c) **agreed** to delegate authority to the executive (with Chair's sign off) the specific arrangements for managing these funds.

- 2.5 The Board emphasised the importance of a joined-up approach that supported the enabling role of Local Delivery Pilots, and Active Partnerships. It was noted that other key players (including LGA and Mayors of London and Manchester) were in the early stages of formulating their approaches, and Sport England had an important leadership and co-ordination role to play.
- 2.6 For the funding packages described at paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4, the Board was content that the extraordinary circumstances and need for expeditious delivery justified an exception to Sport England's Delegated Authority Policy which normally permitted Board to delegate only to Committees.
- 2.7 In respect of the 'Lifting of restrictions' and 'Re-establishing organisations and operations' phases, the Board:
- a) **agreed in principle** funding envelopes of:
- £10 million towards stimulating the sector while restrictions were being lifted;
 - £10 million towards accelerating organisations getting back to business in a post-restrictions period; and
 - £10 million towards accelerating organisational delivery in a post-restrictions period.
- with more detailed proposals being brought back to the Board for approval at the appropriate times;
- b) endorsed this approach of providing support for partners as they emerged from crisis mode. Board members identified a strong likelihood that consumer behaviour and expectations would change dramatically during this exceptional period, with hard-won, newly habituated behaviour change in target audiences at risk of regression. Equally, however, adversity could stimulate positive behaviour change and new patterns of activity, and it was important that these were encouraged and nurtured. It was asked that officers consider how these funding streams might support this (for example, by prioritising joint bids from known and new partners).
- 2.8 Alison Donnelly briefed the Board on current communications and campaigns activity. The Board:
- a) noted the intensive use of existing website, newsletters and social channels to share information and guidance on keeping active. Sport England was working with a range of media to generate coverage for its

messages, and with partners to build consensus, endorsement and reach.

- b) expressed strong support for the “Join the movement” #stayinworkout campaign being developed for launch on 25 March. Board members felt that the approach outlined would give direction, coherence and maximum exposure to the diverse online offers that were already materialising in this space. Board members noted that officer-level discussions were in hand with Sport Scotland and Sport Wales regarding joint working on the campaign;
- c) commended the speed, clarity, and sensitivity with which Sport England had reached out to stakeholders and the wider public, and noted the continuing importance of practical and user-focused advice and encouragement on what people could do and how to do it under constrained circumstances.

2.9 Nick Bitel thanked members for their contributions and asked officers to continue implementing the action plan, including the funding package agreed by the Board. **Action: Nick Pontefract.**

Sport England Strategy Development

2.10 Simon Macqueen and Naomi Shearon outlined ongoing and proposed changes in how Sport England was approaching the developing of its future strategy in line with the new priorities of “Supporting the Sector” and “Keeping the Nation Active” (paper MB20-12A refers).

2.11 The Board supported the proposition that maintaining the original timetable of developing and launching the Strategy by September 2020 alongside strategic early investment decisions was no longer viable. It was **agreed** that to proceed to existing timescales and roll out phase 3 (testing the emerging strategy) now would be to disregard the overwhelming and immediate challenges of COVID-19 faced by all parts of the sports and physical activity ‘ecosystem’, and indeed the country as a whole. The Board:

- a) **agreed** the proposed approach of one year rolled-on funding for key partners with existing funding commitments that end in March 2021 or sooner, under a light-touch process that minimised administrative burden on partners. At this stage, further Board engagement would be required over the coming months and result in a final list of decisions likely to come to the Board in June for approval where required;
- b) noted that the delay in the launch did not preclude some key areas of ongoing strategy development work, but that this needed to proceed

with extreme sensitivity to the immediate and longer-term challenges faced by specific partner organisations.

- 2.12 The Board was in consensus that the co-productive approach to shaping early investment decisions and priorities as originally agreed was now no longer practicable. With relevant partners in urgent need of certainty, the Board agreed that clear and timely Sport England commitment here would be vital to supporting key partners and the wider sector. The Board noted that as well as providing immediate relief, the certainty provided would in some cases allow partners the space to focus on longer-term responses to the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath.
- 2.13 The Board reviewed the revised draft strategy framework (MB20-12B). Board members were content that it clearly encapsulated the major messages from existing and prospective partners about what would matter to them in the future strategy. They felt that it set out cogently the future 'direction of travel' and brought closure to the current planning phase, recognising the considerable investment from partners and the shared goodwill the process had generated. They felt it provided a robust basis for how Sport England and its partners should respond to the current crisis. Moreover, in its responsive approach to the crisis, Sport England was itself modelling how the more dynamic and collaborative model of partnering set out in the strategy could work in practice. The Board:
- a) noted the importance of the graphic component of the strategy making its messages real to its target audiences and asked that the final document refer to a 10 year vision rather than a 10 year strategy, subject to these the Board **agreed** that the framework should proceed to copy editing and publication.
 - b) **agreed** that the final Framework document should be made available in a low-key way, tailored to the current context, with the intention that it be revisited with partners when they were able to enter into meaningful longer-term strategy conversations. The Board was content that the public webinar planned for 27 March 2020 should go ahead, in the light of these new arrangements.
 - c) felt that the postponement of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic games (news of which had broken during this discussion) and its knock-on impacts particularly on talent pathways, further reinforced the need for partners to have short term funding certainty.
- 2.14 Nick Bitel thanked Board members and asked that the strategy be taken forward along the lines agreed by the Board (**Action Simon Macqueen**)

3. Finance

- 3.1 Serena Jacobs introduced paper MB20-13 which presented the 2020-21 budget and an update on Sport England's overall investment plan for the current strategy period ending March 2021, the financial projections for our Lottery income, and cash flow forecasts. The 2021-21 budget was based on: a strong drive towards realistic budgets that deliver with the capacity available; delivery of the three activity targets; development of the next strategy; and cost flexibilities agreed with DCMS.
- 3.2 The Board discussed the paper and was satisfied with the rigour of this approach. It **agreed on an interim basis** the budget as presented, recognising that the full impacts of COVID-19 on Sport England's operations and the environment it worked within were not yet clear.
- 3.3 The Board, therefore, asked for a revised position to be brought back to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee (ARGC) meeting of 28 April) with officers briefing on worse case scenarios as part of this discussion, and to subsequent ARGC or Board meetings if necessary. The Board noted that officers and DCMS officials were seeking clarity on the likely impacts of COVID-19 on lottery income and asked to be kept aware of any substantive impacts of this on the budget. **(Action: Serena Jacobs)**

4. Strategic investments

Reducing Inactivity (Health) progress and We Are Undefeatable Investment Proposal

- 4.1 Sarah Ruane and Al Strang Introduced paper MB20-14 which briefed Board members on progress against reducing inactivity in the context of health and inequalities, and subsequent learning. The Board noted in particular the achievements of the *We are Undefeatable* campaign and was content with progress overall.
- 4.2 The Board supported in principle the original argument behind the *We are Undefeatable* investment proposal set out in the paper but **agreed** with officers that COVID -19 meant that a revised approach was needed. It welcomed the additional thinking set out in paper MB20-14 -addendum and supported the actions reported in the paper that had already been taken in respect of *We are Undefeatable* in response to COVID-19.

- 4.3 The Board concurred that the *We are Undefeatable* coalition of charities – with Sport England’s support – was well placed to provide target audiences (especially those isolated at home) with additional tailored support at this critical time. Board members noted that there were particular challenges for people with mental health issues who were living in physical and social isolation. Board members noted that the authoritative voice that Sport England lent to the campaign was particularly important at a time when there was inevitable uncertainty amongst prospective audiences about what sorts of activities were and were not appropriate in the current circumstances. Given the effective relationship between Sport England and the delivery partners, the principle of a more flexible approach was endorsed that was responsive to the changing context and new information.
- 4.4 The Board **agreed** the broad approach to the *We Are Undefeatable* campaign set out in the papers and to
- a) an initial award of £5.15 million to Age UK to deliver it in the remainder of the calendar year,
 - b) a progress review (based on a range of insight and indicators and reporting on lessons learned) and decision by Investment Committee on releasing further funding at the end of 2020, on the basis of the originally proposed total funding envelope of £9.15 million.
- 4.5 Nick Bitel thanked contributors and asked officers to progress the *We are undefeatable* campaign work in line with the Board’s decisions (**Action: Al Strang and Sarah Ruane**).

Capital Investment

- 4.6 Charles Johnston set out for the Board’s approval the business case for Capital Investment – additional lottery investment into the Community Asset Fund and Strategic Facilities Fund. The Board discussed the proposals and considered that overall the business case remained persuasive. Board members felt it demonstrated trust in and leadership of the sector, and signalled that Sport England was interested in long term relationships as well as immediate transactions. The Board also welcomed the introduction of more flexible funding ranges across both streams.
- 4.7 The Board **agreed** that both programmes’ award budgets be increased through the increase in the lottery award budget by £12m per annum and that the upper and lower thresholds of both programmes be extended as

set out in the paper. This increase in funding would be for one year initially, with future funding levels within the context of the 2021–25 Strategy.

- 4.8 The Board additionally highlighted the need for an in-depth understanding of what sporting and physical activities were being supported, where, and how this related to the lower socio-economic groups. It was asked that officers to monitor and analyse these distributions and seek to address imbalances through this funding.
- 4.9 Nick Bitel thanked contributors and asked officers to progress these arrangements as agreed by the Board (**Action: Charles Johnston**)

5. CEO's report

- 5.1 Tim Hollingsworth presented his CEO's report (paper [MB20-16](#)).
- 5.2 The Board noted his update on the 2020–21 exchequer funding for School Games Organisers and welcomed the DHSC's confirmation of the remainder of the 2020/21 financial year funding of £4.7 million.
- 5.3 The Board noted the responses to its request for further reassurance around the mandate and budget for early talent investment for 2021–25, and was content that Sport England:
- a) was working with a clear understanding of desired results for Talent Pathways and the success measures in place to drive diversity and inclusion change;
 - b) had identified 'system wide interventions';
 - c) was sighted on non talent-specific barriers in community sport that need fixing or removing to make the talent pathway more accessible and was building its understanding of how they affected different groups.
- 5.4 The Board reviewed recommendations in the paper for the award of contract for managing of the Active Lives Surveys for Adults (contract SE921) and Children and Young People (contract SE925) for four further waves. Having duly considered the procurement process, the analysis of bids with moderated scoring, finance summary, proposed contract management arrangements, and the risk and opportunity analyses, the Board **agreed** that the contract be awarded to the supplier recommended in the paper, with:

- a) a base contract value for the Adult Survey covering four annual waves and an option to extend for a further annual wave, plus provision for additional expenditure to boost local authority samples where required, at the values set out in the paper;
- b) a base contract value for the Children and Young People Survey covering four annual waves and an option to extend for a further annual wave, plus provision for additional expenditure for extension and further development of the survey as required, at the values set out in the paper;
- c) officers taking due account of the risks identified in the paper in their management of the contract, with further assurances sought in advance of award about the company's gearing and in the light of the changed environment brought about by COVID-19.

5.5 Lisa O'Keefe would report back to officers and progress the procurement
(**Action: Lisa O'Keefe**)

5.6 Lisa O'Keefe orally updated the request in the paper for the Board to approve an increase in the overall budget of the recently launched *This Girl Can* community fund. The Board was supportive in principle of the original proposal for adding resource and impetus directly to targeted delivery and activation projects with good community connections but agreed that circumstances now demanded a revised approach. The Board **agreed**:

- a) that the fund should be paused, while Sport England assessed its internal investment management capacity in the light of reprioritised funding elsewhere, and the potential uptake of the fund in the markedly different environment that recipients would now have to work within;
- b) to a reduction in overall budget from the originally proposed £10 million to £5 million, to be comprised of unallocated lottery funding rather than lottery plus exchequer funding. The Board was comfortable with officers' working assumption of a success rate of 45-50% of bids, with a number of inappropriate requests having been directed towards other potential sources of funding.

5.7 **Action: Lisa O'Keefe** to progress in line with the Board's recommendations.

6. Any other business

6.1 The Board noted the following papers circulated for information:

- a) MB20-17A minutes of the Audit risk and Governance Committee meeting of 28 January 2020

- b) MB20-17B) Draft minutes of the Sports Council Trust Company meeting of 12 February 2020
- c) MB20-17D 2016-21 Strategy – priority reports
- d) MB20-17E Stakeholder research interim findings presentation.

6.2. With regard to the Sport England Equality report: six monthly update (paper MB20-17C) which had also been circulated for information, the Board asked for a full discussion at the 12-month report stage. **Action: Victoria White**

6.3 With no further business items being raised, Nick Bitel thanked attendees and closed the formal meeting. A short private session for members would follow. The Board was next scheduled to meet on 6 May 2020.

Agreed by the Sport England Board at its meeting of 6 May 2020