

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee following their Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League.

January 2013

Widening participation in sport is a high priority for the Welsh Government so I was very pleased to provide evidence to this inquiry and I welcome the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's report. Football is an immensely popular game in Wales, watched and played by large numbers of people and we have seen the impact that it can have in terms of creating a sense of national pride. It is very encouraging that the Committee received so many positive and constructive views from key stakeholders and other interested parties about the future of the Welsh Premier League and football in Wales more generally. The Welsh Government and Sport Wales will continue to work in partnership with the FAW and the Welsh Football Trust to help the governing body to deliver its strategic plan to further develop the game in Wales.

Grassroots development of the game is essential if football is to thrive in Wales. The Welsh Government is committed to providing more sporting opportunities for all our young people, irrespective of their personal circumstances and we continue to support the development of grassroots football via Sport Wales who work closely with the Welsh Football Trust. Our investment has helped coaching standards to improve, provided more opportunities for young people to play the game and helped to put in place robust structures to help identify our more talented players so that they can receive better coaching and progress.

A strong theme contained in the report is the use of 3G and 4G pitches and I recognise the advantages of installing these types of facilities both in terms of continuous use and their availability throughout the year. However, I must stress that even if we had budgets which would enable us to support such large scale capital investment simply replacing grass pitches with these type of facilities across Wales would not be a panacea to the issues identified by this report. The starting point has to be a more strategic discussion between the sports' governing bodies, the local authority and clubs about these types of facilities that are required in the long term and how their use can be maximised for the benefit of the wider community, including those people who do not currently participate in sport.

I have set out my response to the report's individual recommendations which fall under the responsibility of the Welsh Government.

Detailed responses to the report's recommendations are set out below. The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 1. The FAW, Welsh Government and Sport Wales should develop a co-ordinated approach to developing football in Wales. The Minister for Sport should report back to the Assembly on the progress of discussions.

Response: Accept. The Welsh Government and Sport Wales will work closely with the FAW and the Welsh Football Trust to deliver the governing body's strategic plan for further developing the game in Wales.

There are no financial implications. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 2. The FAW and Welsh Government should explore how the WPL clubs can support the delivery of broader policy objectives and the support that the clubs can access, financial or otherwise, to do so.

Response: Accept. The Welsh Government will encourage the FAW to work with Welsh Premier League clubs to explore what support the clubs require to be able to help them develop and how they can link in to achieving broader policy objectives.

There are no financial implications.

Recommendation 3. The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies.

Response: This recommendation is for the FAW to respond.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation.

Response: Accept in principle. The Welsh Government will encourage the FAW to work with Welsh Premier League clubs to explore what more they can do to support grassroots football and to increase levels of participation, including the potential for clubs to act as community hubs.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales.

Response: Accept in principle. The development of accessible, multi-use facilities including 3G and 4G pitches is central to Sport Wales' Community Sport Strategy which I launched in April 2012. The Strategy highlights the need for the sports' governing bodies, local authorities and clubs to work together to identify and plan what provision is needed and its potential use. I expect the provision of 3G and 4G pitches to form part of these discussions about long term facility planning and maximising usage for wider community benefit.

Recommendation 6. The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches.

Response: This recommendation is for the FAW to respond.

Recommendation 7. As part of the FAW's proposed Community Hub model, the FAW and Local Authorities should work together to ensure that the clubs have assistance to reach all parts of their communities.

This recommendation is for the FAW to respond.

Recommendation 8. The FAW and Sport Wales should explore how the academy system can be used to support grassroots football.

Response: Accept. The academy system currently feeds the Welsh Premier League clubs and this is a matter which is best investigated by the FAW and the Welsh Football Trust with input from Sport Wales.

There are no financial implications.

Recommendation 9. The FAW and Sport Wales should explore whether additional financial assistance can be put in place to support young people who wish to play football, but who find it difficult to do so because of the financial demands (e.g. purchase of kit, travelling costs etc).

Response: Accept. The Welsh Government and Sport Wales are committed to ensuring that poverty is not be a barrier to participation in sport. In April 2012 Sport Wales published a Child Poverty strategy which outlined the steps they will take to enable children, young people and their families living in poverty to access quality sporting opportunities. Sport Wales will work with the FAW and the Welsh Football Trust to explore the scope for additional measures that could give disadvantaged young people greater access to sporting opportunities.

There are no financial implications.