

Thank you Mr Pels.

Firstly can I reiterate my colleague's thanks to the Committee, on behalf of the Board of Hockey Ireland, for the opportunity to meet and speak with you here today.

As Member the Hockey Ireland Board, I would like to take a little time to give the committee an insight into the current position the sport of hockey finds itself, the key challenges it faces and the broad strategic direction the Board are proposing to take the sport, over the next three to five years.

Our CEO has already provided you with some understanding of how the current Hockey Ireland body emerged from the amalgamation of two pre-existing Unions. He has also given you a snapshot of the current position regarding membership, funding models and development.

I propose to speak to three key areas that together take up a significant part of the Board's time and resources. These areas broadly map to many of the key areas set out in the recent National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027. The three areas I will focus on are as follows;

1. Governance
2. Structures
3. Strategy (Participation & Development)

Governance

Firstly it is important to record that Hockey Ireland's approach to governance is led and informed by the principles of good governance as outlined in the 'Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charity (CVC) sector'. The Board has a Governance sub-committee that on a comply-or-explain basis, monitors, reviews and updates or develops policies and other bye laws on an ongoing basis to meet the ever changing needs of the sport and its membership. In fact over the past 18 months the sub-committee has successfully completed a comprehensive update of the organisations bye laws and policy documentation. Governance is a regular item on Board meeting agendas triggered by update reports from the sub-committee. Our approach to governance also includes a new method for sourcing and recruiting members to the Board. We aspire to gender equality and look to provide a positive role model to our provinces and clubs in this regard. This is evidenced by the fact that our twelve person Board had until very recently a 50:50 gender split. We believe we were one of the few sporting Boards to achieve this level of equality. However due to the recent loss of one of our female board members we currently have a 7 – 5 split. This still falls above the minimum best practice target of 40% set for e.g. State Boards. The Presidency of Hockey Ireland which rotates between the four

provinces also looks to ensure, where possible, that there is a gender rotation through each new Presidential term.

Structures

Hockey Ireland have recently rolled out and implemented the first comprehensive database of its membership. The introduction of this type of information system was a strategic priority in our last strategy and will when fully operational will provide invaluable feedback that can be used for the benefit of the entire membership. While there are a few outstanding gaps, namely umpires, schools, 3rd level, and Masters player's to be added; the next big cohort of the hockey family to be accommodated is our volunteers, the lifeblood of the organisation on a day to day basis.

Members of Hockey Ireland are currently catered for through membership of their respective clubs which in turn are affiliated to their respective province. The new database will help to link these members more closely to the national body while at the same time provide the clubs and provinces with easy access to additional information i.e. lists of members with skill sets such as coaching qualifications, umpire accreditation and administrative experience.

Strategy (Participation & Development)

Hockey Ireland caters for the hockey community on an all island basis i.e. on a 32 county basis. This bring significant advantages but also adds a degree of complexity to the administrative process required to manage the sport across two different jurisdictions. As with any sport there are areas of greater club and player density. These are driven partly by an urban/ rural divide but are also an artefact of the manner in which the sport was first introduced into the country over a hundred years ago. From a Board perspective this presents a very significant opportunity as there are communities within both the urban and rural areas that are very interested in developing sport and in particular the sport of Hockey. The recent successes of the national senior men's and women's teams has served to create a very positive impression of a sport that can be played throughout one's life time. The men's participation at the Rio Olympics, the women's silver medal performance at the FIH World Championships and subsequent qualification for the Tokyo Games has provided exemplary roles models for the younger generations. Recently it was brought to my attention that hockey as a sport caters equally to both genders and all ages (from 4 years to 80 years plus as evidenced at a recent masters hockey tournament). It is also important to note that the Sport of Para Hockey is continuing to grow and provides, through the club system, the opportunity for individuals with intellectual difficulties to participate and enjoy the camaraderie and health benefits of the sport. The current public profile of the sport was brought to a crescendo at the Olympic Qualifier tournament, held in

the Energia Stadium in Donnybrook at the start of November this year. While the success of the women's team, in such a nail biting finish, was fantastic the fact that over 12,200 people (a record for a hockey match in Ireland and the largest crowd ever to attend a women's international match in Ireland) attended over the two nights of the weekend showed that interest in the sport was at an alltime high.

Hockey while perceived as expensive is at its most basic level a relatively inexpensive activity. In essence, there are only three requirements to get a community up and running to get started in the sport; a playing surface, hockey sticks and balls and a coach with an understanding of the basic skills of the game. The provision of the equipment has an easy solution, that Hockey Ireland and the clubs and provinces can provide if appropriately supported.

The two challenges are the sourcing, training and certification of an adequate number of coaches and volunteers and also finding suitable areas for playing and practising. It is interesting to note that currently a group of 60 girls practice and play regularly on a GAA pitch in Waterford. We also have a number of examples of schools and community groups, sometimes in conjunction with their Local Sports Partnerships and Hockey clubs, taking up indoor hockey in local halls. Ireland did in the recent past have quite a number of clubs and players playing indoor hockey. This is an area that Hockey Ireland see as a potential opportunity for developing the game and introducing it to new community groups of all ages. Another creative initiative that started relatively recently is the concept of Hockey for Mums and Hockey for Dads. Innovative clubs decided to provide the opportunity for parents to learn and play hockey, at their level, while waiting for their children to complete their training and practice sessions. In some instances up to 60 adults availed of the chance to try the sport out and as a results started to get more imbedded in the clubs and sport as a whole. Most parishes across the country have access to an indoor hall that can be easily set up to accommodate hockey thereby subverting the immediate need for expensive outdoor facilities to be developed.

Finally to summarise, the Board of Hockey Ireland recently held a full-day session to finalise the strategic pillars for the sport over the next 3 – 5 years. We were joined that day by representatives from Sport Ireland, the Olympic Federation of Ireland, members of the current senior men's and women's squads, a representative from our Junior Age Group (JAG) teams, people representing the four provinces, Hockey Ireland staff and Hockey Irelands European Hockey Federation representative. Participation and Development was one of the key pillars that everyone agreed was key to our strategic development as a sport. In fleshing out the pillar we called out the need to expand the geographic footprint of the sport, increase the number players at all level and all ages and broaden

the number and skills of volunteers who are involved in hockey be they coaches, umpires or administrators.

The consensus as to main facilitator that will help us to achieve this was collaboration with other sports organisations, local sports partnerships, schools and colleges and local communities whereby they will provide the people resources be they players or volunteers and Hockey Ireland and the LSP's will work to provide the expertise and infrastructure to allow things to happen.

Thank you Chairman and thanks to the Committee for your time and for affording us the opportunity to meet with you today.