

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

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*Dé Céadaoin, 14 Samhain 2018*

*Wednesday, 14 November 2018*

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The Joint Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

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### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Imelda Munster,	Senator Frank Feighan,
Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe,	Senator John O’Mahony.
Deputy Robert Troy,	

DEPUTY FERGUS O’DOWD IN THE CHAIR

### **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** There are no apologies. I remind members to switch off their mobile phones. I propose that we go into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*The joint committee went into private session at 1.48 p.m. and resumed in public session at 1.52 p.m.*

### **Business of Joint Committee (Resumed)**

**Chairman:** I remind members to turn off their mobile phones completely as they interfere with recording equipment. Before we commence our main business I will turn to correspondence No. 2018/352, which is a letter dated 6 November from the Taxi Dispatch Operators Representative Association, TDORA, stating that it would like to make a presentation to the joint committee to brief members on the extraordinary changes that have taken place in the provision of taxi-type services worldwide to show why significant changes need to be made to the Taxi Regulations Act 2013 and to outline the changes in regulations it would like to see. I propose to consider this as part of our work programme. Agreed? Agreed.

No. 2018/353 is an email dated 9 November from Aileen Fallon, clerk of the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, concerning the launch of a report on tackling childhood obesity which is being held on Thursday 15 November at 10 a.m. Members may wish to attend. It is fine if they do.

No. 2018/354 is an email dated 9 November from Michelle Carpenter concerning a possible upcoming committee meeting at the National Rowing Centre in Cork organised by our Vice Chairman. We will make sure that happens when we visit Cork, which I hope will be soon.

No. 2018/355 is from Hugh Creegan of the National Transport Authority concerning phase one of the BusConnects core bus corridors project and the publication of the emerging preferred routes for four of the 16 previously launched routes. There was a briefing this morning to inform Members about it. I hope we will have a hearing down the road, whenever members wish.

### **National Sports Policy 2018-2027: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport**

**Chairman:** The purpose of today's meeting is to consider the national sports policy 2018 - 2027. I welcome the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Shane Ross; the Minister of State at the Department with special responsibility for tourism and sport, Deputy Brendan Griffin; and the officials who are present.

Before we commence, for the purpose of officials attending I am required to read the following. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they

should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I am joined on my left by the Minister of State with responsibility for tourism and sport, Deputy Griffin. I am also joined by officials of the Department: Ken Spratt, Peter Hogan, Noel Sheahan and James Lavelle. With the permission of the Chairman, I propose to share my speaking time with my colleague, the Minister of State. Deputy Griffin and I had the privilege of launching the national sports policy towards the end of July at a wonderful venue in central Dublin, the Laurence O'Toole Recreation Centre on Sheriff Street. Many people came together on that day to showcase the best of the north east inner city community as local people of all ages participated in a variety of sporting activities on a gloriously sunny day. In so many ways it was the perfect start for this ten year policy. I wish to extend my thanks once again to all concerned.

There are three high-level goals in this national sports policy: increased participation across all sports in Ireland; more excellence in terms of governance as well as in the sporting arena; and improved capacity to allow for more people to get involved in sport and for those already engaged in sport to improve standards across the board. Our ultimate ambition is for every citizen to engage regularly in some form of sport and physical activity, irrespective of their background or their physical capabilities. We want to raise Ireland to the top of the table for participation.

To achieve the aims of the policy it is clear that we must prioritise certain groups to help them to engage more in sport and be more physically active generally. The committee members know as well as I do the extraordinary benefits this can deliver for people's physical health and mental well-being. When we launched the policy we highlighted a number of priorities, such as the need to accelerate our women in sport programme by doubling the annual funding provision from €1 million to €2 million in 2019. While the gender gap in sports participation is narrower now than at any point over the past ten years, at just 4.5%, I am determined to eliminate that gap altogether. I am very pleased that the necessary funding is in place to begin that journey in 2019.

Many of the great Irish sporting successes this year have been achieved by women and the list of achievements over the past 12 months has been phenomenal. To name but a few, we have been enthralled by brilliant moments such as the remarkable run of the women's hockey team to the World Cup final; the International Association of Athletics Federations, IAAF, World U20 Championships successes for Sommer Lecky and the women's 4 x 100 m relay squad; the European Athletics U18 Championships medals for Rhasidat Adeleke, Sarah Healy and Sophie O'Sullivan; and our medal wins at the World Para Athletics European Championships and the World Para Swimming Allianz European Championships, which were hosted here in Dublin during August.

Our Paralympic sports stars provide a welcome illustration of another area of priority, which is to provide increased opportunities for people with a disability to participate in sport. To drive this initiative, funding has been provided in the 2019 Estimates to introduce a dedicated €1 million programme for disability sport, which will facilitate the deployment of a sport inclusion

disability officer in all 26 local sports partnerships countrywide.

We have set ourselves a number of ambitious targets, and I would like to highlight some of them today. We aim to increase overall participation in sport from 43% to 50% of the population by 2027. That means the equivalent of 250,000 more people

participating in sport in nine years time. Our high performance funding will be more targeted in order to deliver more Olympic and Paralympic medals. We are aiming for 20 medals for the Los Angeles games in 2028. We also want to see the adoption by all funded sports bodies of the governance code for the community, voluntary and charity sector.

I reiterate my thanks to Mr. John Treacy and all at Sport Ireland for their commitment to Irish sport. They have shown great leadership in the fight against doping in sport and are leading the call for reform in the World Anti-Doping Agency, WADA. At the recent anti-doping summit in the White House, the high regard in which Mr. Treacy and his team at Sport Ireland are held among their peers was abundantly clear. We will never tolerate anything which compromises the integrity of our sports and that message is emphasised in this policy.

We are also determined to continue our investment in sports facilities through the sports capital programme and the new large-scale sports infrastructure fund. The ongoing development of the Sport Ireland national sports campus is proof that Ireland is committed to excellence and opportunity in sport. This is an historic document that for the first time outlines the Government's vision for sport and reminds us all of its importance in our heritage and culture. We want to ensure sport remains at the heart of our society. More important, we want to see Irish people of all abilities taking part in some sport or physical activity each day for the benefit of their physical and mental health.

I will now hand over to the Minister of State, Deputy Brendan Griffin, to comment on policy.

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** As the Minister has just outlined, the publication of the national sports policy demonstrates this Government's recognition of the value of sport to our nation. I know from first-hand experience how playing sport is positively associated with better educational performance and provides young people with life skills such as goal setting, self-improvement, social skills, working in a team or alone to achieve something personally rewarding. Sport can teach us so much about the value of commitment to a worthwhile objective, discipline and many other personal skills.

It is clear how much Irish society has benefited from the contribution of sports clubs and volunteers in our towns and villages. These selfless individuals provide so many people with an outlet to express themselves through sport. A fantastic aspect of sport is that one can have a life-long relationship with it, whether as a participant, coach, administrator, volunteer or supporter and it is especially pleasing to note that we are seeing so many people staying active for longer. The contribution of sport and physical activity to our country is significant. Its contribution to tackling the challenge of obesity and sedentary lifestyles is critical to maintaining a healthy population. We all benefit when our citizens spend more time off the couch and spend that time in the gym, going for a walk or cycle or getting out on the playing field.

The consultation process which preceded the publication of the national sports policy reiterated how much credit is due to the national governing bodies of sport, the local sports partnerships and other sporting organisations for promoting sport in Ireland. This policy takes

account of that extraordinary contribution and presents a vision for sport in 2027 that is based on inspiration for our people; involvement and enjoyment by participants and spectators; and excellence from our high performance athletes. The policy contains 57 actions and is backed up with an envisaged doubling of State investment in sport to €220 million in 2027.

The Government recognises the scale of the challenge we face and is committed to increasing support to achieve our shared ambition. The Minister and I made the case very strongly for an increase in the 2019 Estimates and we have made a really good start that has been widely welcomed by the sports sector. The Minister and I have worked closely on the make-up of the sports leadership group, which is to be co-chaired by us. We are very excited by the establishment of that group. The ambitions of the policy are significant and a lot of work will be required to achieve them all but it has been clear from the launch of the policy that the sporting community in this country is eager to see those targets met which is very heartening and encouraging.

I want to continue to see Irish sportsmen and women inspiring the generations to follow in their footsteps, whether at club or county level in Gaelic games, national teams performing in World Cups, European Championships and across the international arena, or athletes across all disciplines competing with the best in the Olympics and Paralympics. There is nothing more uplifting than seeing our own sporting heroes representing us, with the eyes of the world watching. We know that to keep on inspiring our young people we need to do all we can to help our high performance sports people prepare to the same level as their rivals. Increasing the level of our high performance investment is essential and I have stated my aim to treble the level of financial support to around €30 million over the next decade.

The availability of quality sports facilities also has a big impact on raising performance standards. We continue to invest significant resources through the sports capital programme, as well as the new large-scale sports infrastructure fund. The latest round of the sports capital fund closed just last month and we received a record 2,337 applications, again emphasising how important the scheme is for clubs and communities throughout the country. The Sport Ireland national sports campus is also going to be further developed.

I would like to endorse the Minister's observations about the sterling work of Mr. John Treacy, Kieran Mulvey and all in Sport Ireland for ensuring that Ireland's sporting sector continues to develop. I thank them especially for leading the fight for a clean sporting landscape internationally, while still providing opportunities for all the citizens of Ireland to get active and get involved in sport.

**Chairman:** I thank the Minister and Minister of State. Senator O'Mahony is first.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I thank the Minister and Minister of State for their presentations and compliment them for publishing a national sports policy. I am not sure when the last one was published but this new policy is much needed in order to plan a pathway forward for sport in Ireland. The targets set out in the policy document are ambitious. While the benefits of sport cannot be overstated in the context of elite sport's ability to lift the spirit of the nation, as we saw with the achievement of the women's hockey team earlier this year as well as the achievements of the rugby team over many years, increasing participation in sport generally is crucial. That aim must run parallel to the aim of supporting elite sport. While elite sport can lift a nation, increased participation can make us a healthier nation.

A report was launched recently on disability and access to transport which was aspirational in nature. In many respects, this national sports policy document is also aspirational and its suc-

cess will depend on its implementation in the coming years. Reference was made to “targeted funding” for sports in which we have a better chance of success. Recent examples of success include in rowing, hockey and so on. Are we going to target sports in which we have a better chance of winning medals or are we going to invest more in high profile sports at which we have not been particularly successful? How will that targeting happen? Will it be up to the governing bodies to make the case for additional funding by arguing that they can win three or four Olympic medals? A few years ago, for example, following the success of our boxers at international level, considerable funding was provided for that sport. However, the performance of our boxers at the last Olympic Games was disappointing. Does funding disappear if the medals disappear? Sometimes sports need more help when they are not successful in order to get to medal-winning level. How will the targeted funding aspect work in terms of the connection between the Sports Council and the governing bodies?

Reference was also made to inequalities in sport and in that context, women in sport is a big issue at present. There has been a big effort on the part of governing bodies in recent times to promote women in sport and rightly so. I am a member of a committee which is trying to produce leaders in ladies’ Gaelic football. At the ladies’ all-Ireland finals we see the two teams but most of the time the referees and managers are male. There is a big need to change that and fully achieve the potential for women in sport. Can the Minister expand on and explain the increase in funding this year from €1 million to €2 million for the annual women in sport programme?

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** We were all delighted by the launch of the sports policy document last July. It is a welcome document. It was ten years since the previous document for a sports programme was launched. We hope it is not just an aspiration because documents can be put on shelves. I hope we do not have to depend on kneejerk reactions. For example, when the ladies’ hockey team did well on the world stage the Minister was able to find money straight-away to advance their sport and other Olympic sports.

The funding has been doubled from €111 million to €250 million. When will the target spending be achieved? Will that be before the ten-year period ends? I know it will increase in increments but will the increments be within a five, seven or ten-year period? We may not see the programme fully implemented. The Minister of State said there are 57 actions, largely to increase participation in all types of sport. High performance sports are the ones that everyone watches on TV and wants to get involved in the following morning, and there are various sports codes, team and individual. Schools have to be considered to ensure that students of all ages are involved and there have to be recreational activities for those who cannot participate actively. We must not lose sight of people with disabilities. An hour ago we launched a programme on disabled access to transport. It is a case of whether we can deliver these programmes on time and within schedule. There are many targets but what timeframes are there for each target for the people who are following in the Minister’s footsteps? Money will be the big thing. We welcome the funding and commitment but money is the backbone of any project.

I thank the various governing bodies such as Sport Ireland, the Federation of Irish Sport and the revamped Olympic Council of Ireland and the Olympic Federation of Ireland, which has made great strides since the debacle in Rio. I hope they will all work hand in hand. The Minister was in America recently. He has already committed money to the anti-doping programme. Is that guaranteed? We commend the emphasis on anti-doping but will we be at a deficit in activating the overall participation programme?

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I welcome the publication of the sports policy 2018-2027. It is very

important that we have a clear roadmap in place for sports to develop and grow over the next decade. The first of the three key elements is to increase overall participation in sport from 43% to 50% by 2027. To increase participation in minority sports we will need to give more proactive support to this sector as opposed to reactive support as it has been in the past. We need to focus on where the help is needed now. If gold medals were being given out for people's ability to run to the podium and jump on a bandwagon the Minister would have won a gold medal for his handling-----

**Chairman:** The gold medal would go to the late Charlie Haughey. I do not think anyone could beat that, using the Government jet to fly to Paris.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The Minister certainly gave him a run for his money with his support for the women's hockey team. He mentioned it in his address. Somehow he hopes to garner some of the goodwill from their success. That hockey team pulled itself up by its bootlaces to achieve what it achieved. We are reacting with support and by all means I welcome the support for that team now but the support was not there when the team needed it in its infancy. That is what we need to focus on in this policy document, to ensure that the support is there when needed, not when there are cameras present, when there is publicity but in the quiet, out of the public glare, so that we do see an increase in participation.

Yesterday the Irish rugby star, Louise Galvin was quoted in the *Irish Independent*. The article stated:

Curbs on playground games as well as limited or no PE sessions can leave many children at risk of not meeting the recommended 60 minutes' exercise a day. Often it's the PE hall in school that's the first to go if there is a concert or exam going on. [...] Ms Galvin, who is a qualified physiotherapist and is now doing a masters in sports and exercise medicine at the University of Ulster, said parents could think of basic ways to get their children active at home. [...] Ms Galvin is an ambassador for the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists [...] She said children learn a lot more from sport, especially when it comes to mistakes and dealing with disappointment. They learn it's ok to fail. "Sport also gives more balance to the young pupil's life and has huge concentration benefits for study," she added [...] "Girls in sport have better self-images and more confidence."

That sums it up well. As the Minister is aware, many local authorities the length and breadth of the country are picking up the tab or partially picking up the tab to pay for development officers in their municipal areas. In Westmeath we partly fund development officers in the GAA and rugby and some of my colleagues tell me that has extended to cricket and other areas. Is the Minister happy that local authorities are funding this? It is welcome that they are but it is not the ideal funding stream.

The other half is being funded by sporting bodies.

Obesity in younger people is one of the greatest challenges facing Ireland, and how we encourage greater participation in sports is so important. Yesterday's article mentioned the fostering of a culture of competitiveness from an early age, ensuring that people realise it is okay to fail in sports but it is also important to be competitive. If we do not foster competitiveness at an early age, how will we achieve targets set down for Olympic medals? We are often compared with New Zealand because we are similar in population but it beats us in achievements on the sporting fields. That country fosters a culture of competitiveness. Have we a clear plan on how to achieve our target for Olympic medals? Will we focus on a number of key supports where we feel we have the most realistic chance or how is it envisaged that the target will be achieved?

The Minister and the Minister of State mentioned the quality of sporting facilities. Our sports capital programme must be acknowledged for the success it is. When will the large-scale sports infrastructure fund finally be opened? Responses to parliamentary questions indicate it will open “shortly” for months. Is it possible for the Minister to give a clear timeframe on that? Many sporting bodies await the opening of the fund.

One of the key targets is the adoption by all funded sports bodies of the governance code for the community, voluntary and charity sector. It is critical in light of what happened at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and what transpired with the Olympic Council of Ireland. What percentage of our sporting bodies meet the governance code currently? Is there a large body of work to be done to bring the sporting bodies to a standard where they could fulfil the governance code requirements?

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** The Minister identified the need for increased participation but what actions have been planned and what areas or groups have been identified that need specific targeting for increased participation? The sports capital grant has been annualised and it is my understanding is that the scheme is to be reviewed. There was a fiasco last year with the allocations. Has the Department identified improvements in the way the grant allocations will be made? Perhaps disadvantaged areas with the least number of facilities could receive a ring-fenced percentage of grant allocations. They are at a disadvantage because they have fewer facilities and less funding than others. Increasing participation is all the harder if the facilities or resources are not in a locality. Who is in the sports leadership group? Did the Minister or the Minister of State choose the members?

**Senator Frank Feighan:** Most people have raised the matters I wished to discuss. A national sports policy is welcome. The goal is to increase participation in all sports in Ireland. Many years ago soccer had “Participation Through Fun” and once we get people participating, it is wonderful. There was mention of the remarkable run of the women’s hockey team to the world cup final. I highlight it again. It is not just for the Minister and Minister of State but I wanted to work on an all-Ireland hockey team to play in the Commonwealth Games last year. We did not get the buy-in from many of the various organisations in a political sense or nationally. The Commonwealth Games take place every four years or midway between Olympic Games. What is happening in national sports is incredible but the Commonwealth Games are an extra goal that could be worked towards. It is a political issue in some senses but the games have 52 participants, 32 of which are republics. It has a potential audience of 2.4 billion people. Our enhanced participation could ensure that athletes in the Republic of Ireland would have the same opportunities as people in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. I seek the views of the Minister and Minister of State on this despite the controversy. We are beginning to come of age, if we consider what happened last Sunday and the centenary of the armistice, as well as what is to happen during the decade of commemorations. We have come a long way.

I am amazed that there are still 2,337 applications for the sports capital fund. I would have thought that after 15 or 20 years many sports organisations would have developed and installed many floodlights, pitches, training grounds and dressing rooms. It is a great sign that we are not just talking about three or four core sports and many others are seeking funding. Have we reached out to many other sports around the country, including minority sports?

**Chairman:** I thank members for their contributions. Before the Minister responds, I will make a few points. I welcome the significant funding that is being provided for sport in this programme, which is important. The key point we must never forget is the health gain for people, particularly those who do not participate in sport throughout their lives. That is a major



gain, bringing increased longevity, the avoidance of heart disease and other issues. The core of our public health policy should be about giving everybody an equal chance to live to the best of their ability.

I agree with Deputy Munster's comments on disadvantaged areas and allocating a significant portion of funding to them. It was mentioned in the document. We need that positive discrimination. I support the sports at the top, including GAA, soccer and rugby, but few people have the potential to get to the top. It is important to place an even greater emphasis on inclusivity and people getting involved as young as possible. This takes in the facilities they use. John and Mary going to primary school would know about the activities mentioned by the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin, including a two-mile run. It is a good idea and those kinds of activities are important in the development of a healthier population.

Another question relates to older people. As people age, they sometimes get grey hair but their brains do not atrophy. Certainly, their bodies get slower. While it is mentioned in the national sports strategy, we need a greater awareness of the need to include older people who will not be as involved in soccer, Gaelic and rugby as they were. We need a proactive policy. Ideas like a park run or walk are good. It could be 2 km or 5 km. We need to think about it in connection with the Department of Health and Sport Ireland to ensure there is a greater emphasis on the inclusion of older people and on activities they can easily get involved in. I would welcome that. I do not know about Deputy Munster, but I have to leave at approximately 2.40 p.m. to deal with a Topical Issue matter in the Dáil. I will ask Deputy O'Keeffe to take the Chair if we are not finished by then.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I will ask the Minister of State to start and I will follow up on each question.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** I thank Senator O'Mahony for his comments. I also thank the members of the committee who attended the launch in July. It was a successful launch and the document was well received. It is now a matter for all of us to implement and collaborate on. In reply to Senator O'Mahony, it is the first full and comprehensive sports policy the country has ever had. While we have had papers previously, there has been nothing as comprehensive as this and nothing that has involved as much consultation with, and feedback from, key stakeholders. It is a watershed moment for Irish sport and a case now of ensuring we implement everything we want to achieve by 2027.

I was asked about the high performance element. Page 56 of the document sets out a detailed outline of the high performance strategy. I know what the Senator is asking, but it is something of a chicken and egg scenario. If the money is not put in, a sport is less likely to achieve success. It is a difficult matter and one which is ultimately for Sport Ireland to administer. The key is that a new strategy is being put together and implemented on high performance. A new working group has been established and it will work on a strategy throughout 2019 before presenting its final report at roughly this time next year, if not, hopefully, a little earlier, with a view to setting out a 12-year plan to be reviewed every four years in line with the Olympics cycle. That is how we hope to do it. The micro-decisions will be made by Sport Ireland which has an excellent record on high performance and providing for our athletes. The Senator will be familiar with the campus and its high performance unit which is doing great work. On capital expenditure, we are trying to provide improved facilities through the development of the campus.

In the context of the women in sports programme, the doubling of funding to €2 million was

positive. That funding is distributed to the national governing bodies for sports programmes to target women who are either not participating or who are not as active as they would like to be. Sport Ireland distributes the funding to the governing bodies which implement the programmes on the ground. The increased budget we have achieved has helped with the positive results of the programme. Hopefully, we will increase the funding further in time.

When we set the target to move from €111 million to €220 million by 2027 over nine budgets, it implied a projected a requirement to increase the budget by €12 million in 2019 on top of what was there in 2017. Thankfully, we have secured an increase of €16.5 million in the 14 months between the budget and the end of 2019. Of that, €15 million is for 2019. As such, we are ahead of target. Given the projected average requirement of €12 million over nine budgets, we are off to a good start with €15 million in 2019. We need to keep going every year because this document will be of no use if the funding is not provided to match it. However, having the funding is one thing; we need all of the players and stakeholders to get together and ensure they play their part. That is what the implementation and leadership group is about.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Senator O'Mahony addressed the issue of participation and said how important it was to the health of the nation. The current figure is that only 43% are participating fully now. We want to get that up to 50% and the questions are how we do it and which groups we target. The Senator is probably aware that only 23% or 24% of people with disabilities are participating properly in sport. We aim certainly to target them and other disadvantaged people in a very energetic way. One of the ways we will do it is through the introduction of a national network of sports inclusion disability officers allied to local sports partnership. These officers will be expected to work closely with relevant national governing bodies, the disabilities sector, leisure providers, the Cara centre and other stakeholders to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in sport. We have also increased funding, as the Minister of State said.

Senators O'Mahony Feighan asked whether Sport Ireland would target high performance resources at those with the best chance of securing medals. That is the current aim. There is a prevailing view that the funds were previously too well spread and that we might be better off to target those with best chance of winning medals. Deputy Troy referred to New Zealand which has a similar population but a much better medals hit rate. Whereas medals are not the be all and end all, as Senator O'Mahony emphasised, and participation is equally important, they are important to young people who look to these icons and see that we are successful, which encourages their participation in sport in turn.

We have a sports inclusion disability fund which will be targeted at the disabled. We are also going to encourage women's participation in sport, which is where we doubled the funding.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** On increased participation, is there much interdepartmental work being done on physical education in schools? If physical education were implemented across the board in schools, it would increase participation in sport. Is the Department working with the Department of Education and Skills in that regard?

*Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe took the Chair.*

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Yes, it is. The Department of Education and Skills has been identified as a stakeholder in the implementation of the sports policy and it will have a seat on the sports leadership group. It is very important to have that interaction, not only with the Department of Education and Skills, but with other Departments, including the Departments of

Health and Children and Youth Affairs. The sports capital programme was altered this year to make it more accessible to schools. There were some bureaucratic obstacles previously which made it difficult for schools to make valid applications. We have freed that up in the 2018 round.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** They had to combine with local clubs.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** There were also issues with title that were always difficult to get through the validation process. We have tried to rectify much of that and have had a great deal of engagement with the Department of Education and Skills in doing so. Outside of the sports policy process, we were also meeting the then Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton, to see what we could do specifically on the sports capital programme in future to try to roll out better sporting facilities to schools, which is where the children are and where there is a captive audience for a number of hours every day. We have been exploring how the two Departments could collaborate better to facilitate the PE curriculum. It would be a massive cost for any one Department to take on the capital requirements related to PE, for example. We are interested in seeing whether a broader community benefit could result from the implementation of facilities to facilitate the PE curriculum. It is going on across all Departments. There is a role to be played by several Departments such as the Department of Health, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Rural and Community Development. We are trying to interact as much as we can with other Departments.

I have probably answered the budgetary questions asked by the Vice Chairman. I am aware we will have to keep fighting this fight every year to keep up with the requirements to reach the target. We are off to a very good start. We did not commit to a linear increase per annum. If we were looking at a straight line between 2017 and 2027, we have surpassed it already. I am very anxious that we reach the target and, ultimately, beat it. We are doing well at present but that does not mean we can take it easy in the next budget. I want to see more money coming into the sport sector as quickly as possible because it is money that is really well spent. There is not a cent that goes into sport that is not well spent. There is a massive return for the Exchequer and society. I do not see it as sports expenditure but as investment.

**Vice Chairman:** The policy is for ten years but what is the Minister of State's preferred timeframe, if he had his way?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** We have to be realistic. The target is to reach €220 million by 2027. If we can reach it before then, that is great but we have set a realistic target based on all the information and projections and everything available to us. As we know, things happen but this is based on our best possible and most realistic outlook for the future. If we have an opportunity to do it sooner, we will take it. There are massive competing demands across Government. The target we have set is the minimum.

On Deputy Troy's questions-----

**Deputy Shane Ross:** May I respond to the Vice Chairman's questions first?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I will make a number of points so we can deal with it all together. With regard to the knee-jerk reaction to the hockey, we wanted to recognise what they had done. If we had not done anything to acknowledge their achievement, the Vice Chairman would have been the first person to ask where the Minister was and what he was doing when these poor,

unfortunate hockey players were not given any money despite what they had achieved. He cannot have it both ways.

**Vice Chairman:** It took the Minister 24 hours to clarify where it had come from.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** All right. What we did was recognise a minority sport in a very concrete way. We will continue to do that where it is necessary. Sometimes we do not spot them coming all the way but they deserved support, not just with the presence of Ministers over there but also in terms of money and funding for the Olympics. It was not quite a knee-jerk reaction in terms of hockey. When we allotted that funding, we simultaneously gave money to sailing, rowing and other sports that had a good chance and needed funding to go to the Olympics. It was not just hockey. I am very pleased we were able to find the funds to do this. I wish the hockey players well in their endeavours. They have done the nation very proud and the Vice Chairman would be the first to criticise us if we did not recognise that and he would be absolutely right to do so.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** I thank Deputy Troy for his questions. I covered the funding side of things. I have not read Louise Galvin's piece yet but I want to see it. I have touched on the issue of schools already. We are trying to see how we can work better with the Department of Education and Skills to see what type of synergy we could get going there in terms of capital provision and how it can benefit wider communities. Programmes such as the Daily Mile are really important. Athletics Ireland has been to the fore of that with Sport Ireland in rolling it out in schools. Things like that are very important. We do not necessarily need major capital investment to see it happening. I would like to see the Daily Mile kicking in here in this institution. It is something we could help to do. It would help to inspire other workplaces to do it as well. We are very good at telling kids they need to be active and doing sport and other things but we are not so good on following through on them ourselves.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** If we build a culture at a young age, that culture will be maintained through to adulthood.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** The likelihood, which studies show, is that if people develop a good habit at an early age, they will keep doing it. As someone who runs marathons, the Deputy will know the massive benefits of sport across the board for everybody at all ages, not just for children.

On the national governing bodies and development officers, one of the positive things that came from this budget is that we have been able to increase the core funding of the national governing bodies of sport across the board by about €2 million, which is very important for those national governing bodies. That is on top of the Women in Sport programme initiative increase. This money will allow them to roll out programmes for people. We have done well on the capital front in recent years but the funding for programmes and people have not really matched it. This is the first budget where we have seen a substantial increase in the core funding for the national governing bodies which will augur well for on-the-ground programmes and the rolling out of those programmes whether through development officers or other means. It is very encouraging to see. If we can keep that momentum going, it will see more people on the ground trying to get more people active in sport.

One of the core principles of the new policy is to see local authorities taking on a more proactive role in involving people in sport. If one wants to compare the tourism side of the house to the sport side, on the tourism front we have seen a delegation of duty to local authorities in

recent years. It has worked well in most cases. It is a ground-up approach. We want to see local authorities getting more involved with local authority plans and working with the local sports partnerships who have an excellent knowledge on the ground of the issues and challenges. We need to work on the parts of the community where participation is lower than the national average. I very much welcome local authority involvement and the policy hopes to see more of that in a structured and integrated way. It will be very important in terms of leading this forward and for local authorities working with the various organisations and clubs in their areas to try to roll out programmes that are not there at present and to make the most of the facilities. We hope to see a lot of progress on local authority-led audits of sports facilities around the country by next year. They will establish where we have facilities in abundance and also where we are lacking to see how we can best address gaps. We can adjust the policy based on the outcome of that. I think I have covered most issues.

The large-scale sporting infrastructure fund is a new fund. It is an exciting one because, to date, projects of that nature have been planned on an *ad hoc* basis whereas this gives structure to that planning process. It is one that has taken a lot longer to get ready to open than we initially hoped. We are very hopeful of opening it in the very near future. It is something there is massive demand for because there is a pent-up demand from a number of years where that level of funding was not available.

On governance, we have a bit of ground to make up on that but we are making good progress on it. Sport Ireland is very enthusiastic and passionate about ensuring we get the best level of governance across all our national governing bodies and agencies. I am passionate about ensuring we get the best levels of governance across our national governing bodies and agencies. Thus far, 16 bodies have fully adopted the governance code. They include 12 national governing bodies, three local sports partnerships and one other. However, we have a lot to do. We anticipate that by 2021-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** What is the overall percentage of bodies to have adopted the code?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** It is 16 of approximately 76 so we are at approximately the 20% mark. We expect to have the remaining bodies in line by 2021. A positive that perhaps came out of the whole Rio saga is that it led to the casting of an eye at overall governance issues and it was a catalyst for changes which might have taken a lot longer to come about otherwise. There are very good working relationships across Sport Ireland, the national governing bodies of sport and the federation in moving this agenda forward and getting everything in line.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I endorse what the Minister of State says. Rio was a catalyst for addressing many gaps in our corporate governance and it forced everyone to look at themselves and comply with the new rules which are coming into force on the large-scale sports infrastructure fund. Deputy Troy asked why it was taking so long. There is no real reason except that we wanted to get it absolutely right and to put a bit of space between that and the sports capital programme. I think it will be announced by Monday or Tuesday but I ask not to be held to that. We might even be able to do it on Friday. However, it is imminent and it will be a very exciting prospect. It will fill an enormous gap which the sports capital programme does not fill and we anticipate that the fund will be significantly oversubscribed. It will be done in a very fair and transparent way and it will certainly be robust and protect itself from criticism. It will be utterly fair and free of political interference.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Is Deputy Munster coming back?

**Vice Chairman:** No.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** I acknowledge that the committee clashes with other demands. Deputy Munster asked about participation. I refer to chapter 3 of the policy where there are 16 pages on participation alone. To summarise, we know from the most recent sports monitor that participation rates are lower in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and among groups like people with disabilities. We are specifically trying to target those groups with a very comprehensive approach led by numerous agencies, the national governing bodies, local sports partnerships, which already operate in that sphere, and local authorities. It is a collaborative approach across all agencies. We will also work with schools, which is very important and which I have already covered. I point to that particular chapter which provides a comprehensive view of how we plan to proceed.

On the sports capital programme, I get a little frustrated at times when I hear the programme being criticised for not focusing enough on disadvantage. Over 50% of all funding allocated in the most recent programme in 2017 went to areas of disadvantage. We are now looking at how we can adjust the scoring system to weight it even more heavily in favour of applications from areas of disadvantage. While that is very positive, we have already been weighting distribution heavily in favour of disadvantaged areas in the programme.

**Vice Chairman:** One disadvantage these applicants have right away is a lack of property or land. Is there any way to overcome that issue in disadvantaged areas?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** There are a number of things we have done to address that. We have increased the amount of funding available for equipment-only applications from €25,000 to €50,000. If an applicant does not own a facility, an application can still be made under that heading, which will be very useful for many people. It is also useful for certain minority sports such as rowing. A lot of rowing clubs do not own property but use rivers and lakes. Whereas they might have been precluded by not having facilities, the opportunity to apply for equipment only where they have the use of a natural amenity is positive. The cap has increased to €50,000, which is a help.

**Vice Chairman:** While I welcome that, natural amenities are one thing, but some major communities do not even have football pitches. They are disadvantaged. They need resources to buy the ground, never mind building dressing rooms.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Local authorities can apply to the sports capital programme and we have encouraged that. Education and training boards can also apply. It is an area which is covered by that element. While we could go into the business of financing the purchase of land, which is something I remember hearing discussed as far back as 2012 when the programme was being reintroduced, there are a number of caveats to note. It could lead to price inflation in facilities if it was known that a Government grant was available for purchases. One also gets into a whole new territory in terms of where one is going with sports capital. It is not only a question of buying land but of developing it. As such, it is a very different area. There is already a great deal of land in the ownership of agencies which is not being used at all for any purpose, and we need local authorities and agencies to be as resourceful as possible with assets they already have. The programme is open to them.

Deputy Munster asked also about the scoring system. We published the scoring system from the last round and we are working to finalise the detail of the current scoring system. We want to be as fair as possible to everyone. The 2017 programme was the first sports capital

programme round in which the funding announced was directly proportionate to the scores achieved by the applicants. In the case of minority sports, it is important to note that the 2017 programme was open to everybody and that for the first time ever, every valid application was approved for funding. There was no exclusion of minority sports or smaller sporting bodies and everyone who received a score got funding. It varied from county to county because of the *per capita* system. An applicant that received 80 points in Leitrim did not get the same amount as an applicant that got 80 points in Cork. That is perhaps one of the flaws of the programme and it may be that we can review it as we strengthen the scoring system. I am very proud of the 2017 programme and that we have a very transparent and accountable system in place.

I cannot read my own writing and am not sure what Deputy Munster's last question was. Perhaps the Minister might come in.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The Minister of State has covered all of that particularly well. I might move to Senator Feighan's questions. I am well aware and pay tribute to the fact that Senator Feighan has for a long time pursued objectives around all-Ireland sports and the Commonwealth Games. It is a worthy pursuit and one we should address in the context of the fact that Ireland is becoming more and more a global centre of sporting activity. I am not saying we should suddenly offer to host a lot of events, but the Senator will know there are talks under way on the possibility of hosting the Ryder Cup in 2026. There are other focal points for sport, including the Euro 2020 soccer tournament, and there is even talk of us co-operating with the UK for the 2030 World Cup. We are moving into the international sphere and thinking more globally. Given the great achievements we have had overseas, we are thinking more about co-operating with others. All-island sport has worked very well in terms of rugby. The Senator made a very good case for looking at it for other sports but it is as much a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as it is for us. I am happy to encourage any way the Senator thinks is practical subject to the diplomatic niceties involved, about which, more than anybody, the Senator would be appreciative.

**Senator Frank Feighan:** I thank the Minister for his remarks. We play rugby on an all-island basis. A total of 70% of people born on the island of Ireland who reside overseas reside in Commonwealth countries. Deep down, we have this instinct that it is not us but from a legal, educational and political perspective, these people are the same. We are talking about 2.4 billion people. We have this reluctance, which should not exist. We have come an awful long way. I agree with the Minister concerning the cross-border bid by the IFA and FAI to host the 2023 European Championships. It is groundbreaking and sends out a signal that on the island of Ireland, what the Department has been doing all along with things like the sports campus is groundbreaking. What happened last Sunday on the island of Ireland, tens of thousands people in places like Sligo, Dublin, Enniskillen or my home town of Boyle went out and rightly remembered the 200,000 Irish men who served in World War One. We have come of age and are in a much better space from a historical perspective. It was under a Fine Gael Government and a Fine Gael Taoiseach, John A. Costello, that we left the Commonwealth in 1949, possibly on a spat because we felt insulted by the Canadian High Commissioner. There is an awful lot to be gained from sporting links in particular in respect of an issue about which, deep down, we do not talk. I am sorry for going into that but I thank the Minister for his words.

**Vice Chairman:** Does the Minister of State wish to comment what the Chairman said?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** The Chairman raised the issue of the disadvantaged. I addressed that issue with regard to the sports capital programme. Again, I emphasise that we are going through the scoring criteria for the 2018 programme. As soon as we finalise these, we will pub-

lish them as we did with regard to the 2017 programme. We do not do it beforehand because there is a feeling that if we did, we would get the answers we were looking for. Ultimately, we want to get as accurate a portrayal as possible of the situation with regard to the application form. We can then adjudicate as fairly as possible by setting our scoring criteria. If we were to publish them beforehand, everyone would have 100 marks, which is not the way we should be doing it.

The Chairman spoke about inclusivity, which is very much national sports policy. We are trying to get up to 50% participation, reduce the 7:3 percentage and target groups that are not as active at sport and recreation as they should or could be. It is very much about inclusivity and funding following disability and disadvantage across the board. That is what we are trying to do. The Chairman referred to Parkrun, which is a brilliant initiative, and the Daily Mile Ireland. These are the type of programmes that are working on the ground. A ground-up approach is very much needed along with Government support facilitating that. I agree with the Chairman's comments.

**Vice Chairman:** To return to the issue of disadvantaged areas, I welcome the involvement of local authorities and the ETBs but it needs to be put out more into the public domain. In conjunction with the FAI, my local authority has helped with the new Munster centre of excellence in Glanmire but local community clubs are not aware of it. They approach politicians and the local hall giving out about having no ground in respect of getting a facility but sometimes the local authorities will tell them they have no facilities or land. We should make more of this so that they are aware that local authorities and the ETBs have a duty to come on board.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Perhaps I have should have touched on this in my previous answers. We reward clubs that share facilities more-----

**Vice Chairman:** I know.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** So if a club does not have a facility but a group with a facility enters into a licence agreement with that club, it will score far higher than the club that just goes it alone and does not make the facility a shared one. This is already in the sports capital programme. Again, we are considering weighting that even more heavily in the 2018 programme to encourage that type of facility sharing. This targets the type of clubs that are without the facilities referred to by the Vice Chairman. Easing up on the criteria regarding schools involves using State assets that might be currently unavailable and making them available. This, on top of other State agencies and the local authorities, provides a pretty good menu from which to choose in terms of lands that may be available. If we were to get into the land purchase side, we are into-----

**Vice Chairman:** I would ask the Minister of State to give guidance to clubs-----

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** We have tried to do that by having a pretty comprehensive list of information evenings through officials in the Department who have gone around the country, as they have done in previous rounds, to make that information available. The sports capital programme website - *sportscapitalprogramme.ie* - is a fantastic resource and I would urge anyone involved in sport to look at it. We have written to all the key players in sport throughout the country to make them aware of the opening of the programme and the information that is available to them as a resource. In fairness to the officials in the sports capital unit, I do not think they could have done anything more to make the opening of the sports capital programme, the terms and conditions and the opportunity it presents better known to potential applicants all



over the country.

**Vice Chairman:** Regarding spending money on organisations, individuals might get priority over team sports because they might be seen as having a better chance of achieving their goal. Is the Minister of State concerned that team sports could play a secondary role compared with individuals?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Is this general high performance as opposed to capital investment?

**Vice Chairman:** Yes or even working capital for want of a better word.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Sports capital only covers non-personal equipment.

**Vice Chairman:** It concerns the policy document-----

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Going back to my earlier answer, it is a matter for Sport Ireland and the NGBs to agree the high performance strategy and the implementation of that. That is something with which the NGBs are in agreement. They want to see the high performance strategy put in place and administered by Sport Ireland. I do not want to get into an area that is technically its area. How it does it, who the funding goes to and where the best prospects are are matters for Sport Ireland working with the NGBs. We have set our targets in terms of the medal count in future games. We want to see an increase on what we have achieved in recent games. Regarding the implementation of that, I am very confident that Sport Ireland, working with the NGBs, will be able to do that. I look forward to see work on the high performance strategy progress over the next 12 months. That type of structure is needed so that we can give a bit of certainty to our athletes and get the best possible return for our investment. That return on our investment is brilliant for the national mood and pride but these are the people who inspire the next generation. There is a circle. If we can pump money in to increase the levels of facilities and programmes available to help people participate and start at a young age, there is a greater chance that more people will make it through to high performance. If we get more people at high performance performing well on the world stage, these people inspire more people to get involved at grassroots level. We are conscious that it is very cyclical and are trying to bring about a trebling of that funding.

**Vice Chairman:** I will use the example of four 200-metre athletes, all of whom are very good and one of whom is potentially a great runner who will definitely get a medal. All four have good, but not the same, potential. I want the loading to go towards the individual as opposed to the team. How can that be done?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** A panel could have 20 members with only one medal up for grabs. There are economies of scale when it comes to team sports and there are pros and cons for each. Ultimately, an objective decision will be made when it comes our best options. Sport Ireland officials have the expertise to make the right call and I trust them to do so as I have had nothing but positive interactions with the organisation. We are very lucky that Sport Ireland has an excellent team of people working for it. The national governing bodies of sport are a fantastic resource in terms of sports leadership. They are brilliant people. They will have their own sports at heart but the overall picture is very much part of their central ethos. I am confident that we will have a seamless agreement on that front.

**Vice Chairman:** Volunteers are needed to facilitate events for athletes. Will proper supports and regulations for volunteers be provided?

Anti-doping was mentioned. What will happen on the ground?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Governance is being constantly worked on and improved. I acknowledge the role played by volunteers. Sports as we know it in Ireland would not function without hundreds of thousands of volunteers. These people give up their time and volunteer day in, day out and week in, week out to facilities sports for others. Volunteers are the heroes of Irish sport and they are often unsung heroes. I acknowledge that all over the country volunteers do enormous work with people of all ages and backgrounds.

On sports policy, we are trying to create an environment that is as amenable as possible to volunteers and participants in sports. By supporting them with finance, better structures and facilities and a more collaborative approach, we hope to encourage further volunteerism.

**Vice Chairman:** The closing date for sports capital grant scheme applications has passed. How much money has been allocated? Has the scheme been oversubscribed? Can the Minister of State give people hope?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** Of course it is.

**Vice Chairman:** Is the scheme oversubscribed by 20%, 100% or whatever?

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** The budget is €40 million. I hoped that the scheme would come in somewhere around €39 million and I would be left to wonder what to do with the remaining €1 million. More than €163 million has been sought. I assume that the Vice Chairman is familiar with the New Testament and the miracle of the seven loaves and fishes. It would be great if we could replicate the miracle with sports capital funding. We want to distribute the money to the sporting organisations as quickly as possible but the officials in the sports capital unit are faced with a massive administrative load. Initially, we hope to deal with the 2017 invalid applications that have been resubmitted. We would love to complete this work before Christmas but I do not want to tie the Department to that deadline as progress depends on a number of moving parts.

**Vice Chairman:** I appreciate that.

**Deputy Brendan Griffin:** In the new year, we will have the new 2018 applicants and we hope to allocate funding sometime in the spring. For the first time ever, and before the allocation stage, if an application is incomplete or something has been omitted the applicants will be written to seeking a correction. The initiative should substantially reduce the number of invalid applications and create an awful lot of goodwill. Unfortunately, the initiative will slow down the process. There will be a second chance so that one slight omission from a document or an anomaly or anomalies can be corrected. It will be the first time that applicants will be afforded that opportunity. The Minister and I were very keen to ensure that would happen. The initiative is fair to the applicants and the volunteers, ultimately, who put the applications together.

**Vice Chairman:** As there are no further questions, I thank the Minister and Minister of State for taking time out of their busy schedules and, more particularly, for launching the national sports policy last July. We look forward to the policy working.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I thank the Vice Chairman.

The joint committee adjourned at 3.15 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 28 November 2018.