

IFRCS38 Dee Pattemore, Club Chairperson, Gwent Hockey Club

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Dee Pattemore, Cadeirydd y Clwb, Clwb Hoci Gwent | Evidence from: Dee Pattemore, Club Chairperson, Gwent Hockey Club

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

The club has experienced an increase in facility hire fees, combined with a decrease in the quality of those facilities. Reductions in the number of staff employed at the leisure centre at which the club is based, alongside changes in personnel within senior roles, has weakened the Centre's relationship with its key clubs. Customer service levels have fallen significantly, while response times have extended.

A lack of available funding, combined with the Centre's own financial pressures, resulted in delays in faulty floodlights being repaired as funds needed to be obtained prior to replacement lights/bulbs being fitted. As a winter sport, floodlights are essential for training and the appropriate level of lighting is paramount for safety. The club noted that approximately half of the available lights were not working throughout last season, with the number of faulty lights increasing towards the end of the season. Club training sessions had to be adjusted accordingly whilst evening matches were not possible due to the inadequate lighting.

Equipment has also deteriorated to the extent that it is no longer fit for purpose as it does not comply with the minimum requirements for matches. Various other operational matters regarding the quality and maintenance of the pitch and access to suitable changing rooms have also been raised. The replacement cost remains a barrier to these being addressed, with temporary short-term, inferior solutions often applied rather than matters being properly resolved. These

substandard facilities compared to other areas, particularly those facilities used by opposition clubs in the West of England, can deter people from participating in the sport, either in the area or completely.

Budget cuts have also led to a reduction in opening hours, particularly on a Saturday, which is the peak time for club league matches. The club has been unable to play all of its 'home' games at its home pitch as a result.

Significant decreases in funding for the sport's National Governing Body (NGB) in Wales, has resulted in a reduction in the number of support staff and services available to clubs. Lack of resources and training opportunities, including fewer available coaching and umpire courses, has placed additional pressure on existing volunteers and made it more difficult to attract new people into certain roles. The inability to fill coaching positions at the club has made it challenging to attract new and retain existing club members.

Shortfalls in NGB funding will inevitably likely result in increased membership fees for both the club and its individual members. The increased cost of participation, combined with the reduced services on offer, fuels the perceived lack of value, creates financial barriers to entry and presents challenges in retaining existing members. If the shortfall cannot be covered by the NGB's membership or alternative sources, a further decline in services/available resources would be anticipated, which could ultimately threaten the existence of the NGB.

2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it?

On a practical level, the club has re-arranged sessions for safety purposes and looked to book alternative pitches in response to the insufficient quality of its regular facilities and early closure of those facilities on weekends.

The use of another pitch at an alternative location provides challenges, however, as availability is extremely limited and fees are often even higher for ad hoc bookings outside the area. The higher fees lead to increased costs for the club, while the increase in travel time can also affect club members' availability to participate.

The use of an alternative location is also currently even more challenging as the next local option previously used is no longer available following the replacement of the artificial turf pitch (ATP) with a 3G pitch, which is not suitable for hockey.

The club continues to review alternative options and work with the local leisure centre to try and improve conditions. The club's committee maintains its focus on matters within its control to continue operating in a sustainable manner for the benefit of its members.

3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?

Poorly maintained facilities will generally need replacing sooner than those that are well cared for.

The replacement of ATPs with 3G pitches could have an irreversible impact on the number of participants in hockey, particularly in certain areas. Within the past 2 years, an ATP has been replaced by a 3G pitch in West Wales and, more recently, the replacement of the ATP with a 3G pitch has been approved at Risca Leisure Centre. This has resulted in the junior section of Risca Hockey Club disbanding and senior members being forced to travel away from their local area if they wish to continue training and playing.

As more and more ATP pitches reach replacement age, the growing trend to lay down 3G pitches instead could have a detrimental impact on the sport of hockey. As clubs are forced to fold or move away from their previous area, it can deter people from continuing their involvement, whether that is in a playing, coaching, umpiring or supporting role. As fewer suitable pitches remain available, there will be greater congestion on a single pitch as multiple clubs attempt to book the same time (there is a limited window in which training sessions and matches can take place) and more clubs will likely fold due to a decrease in membership numbers and/or the inability to find alternative facilities.

Likewise, funding cuts contributing to substandard and deteriorating facilities, reduced support from the NGB and increased costs of participation could all deter people from participating in the sport. As long-standing members retire from volunteer roles, there is a high risk of losing that experience and skill set. Without continued investment, support and initiatives to attract new members, there is a real risk that the negative effects could result in a downward cycle that ultimately results in people moving to other sports or not participating in sport at all.

4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?

Enforce greater consideration of the impact on all sports in respect of facility funding, particularly where there are plans to replace existing facilities with an alternative surface that could have a detrimental impact on a whole sport and clubs and communities in a certain area. Greater and earlier communication with the affected clubs could ensure all options are fairly and thoroughly explored, with some financial support potentially available to the affected clubs if there is no alternative but to change to an unsuitable replacement surface.

5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?

Hockey, as a sport, naturally has greater barriers to entry than some others, such as football and rugby, due to the requirement to use certain equipment and the need to play on an ATP surface. Increases in facility fees and NGB membership fees essentially increase the cost of participation in the sport. These costs will generally be passed on to individual club members which can widen the inequality gap. Any increase in fees is likely to have a greater impact on those of a lower socioeconomic status relative to others.

Many people are attracted to sport at a young age and, if they enjoy it, they are more likely to continue to pursue that interest. Some may drop out of sport in their teenage years due to other interests and commitments. The deterioration in facilities and lack of support staff and coaches may discourage this age group further from participating in the sport.

6. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?
