

18 November 2021

Lucia Wilson
Committee Clerk
Public Accounts Committee
Room 371, Parliament Buildings,
Ballymiscaw, Stormont,
Belfast, BT4 3XX

Dear Ms Wilson

Re: Inquiry Sports Sustainable Fund

Last evening my representative met with a group representing sports clubs from various sports including, Football, GAA, Rugby and Golf. They have just become aware that the Public Accounts Committee are holding an inquiry into the Sports Sustainable Fund. These representatives highlighted a range of deep concerns at the significant unfairness in the levels of financial provision to many clubs, the deficiency of ensuring appropriate criteria for the delivery of the financial support and the lack of credible checks and verification of the accuracy of submitted applications.

The group have asked that the following matters be considered for investigation in your inquiry:

- Northern Ireland Audit Office Report – Para 63..... *The funding was not approved through the Executive until the end of October and November, while the Scheme design started at the beginning of October. There was, therefore, insufficient time to perfectly refine the scheme and any delay for refinement may have prevented its aims being met.*

Was this a major error with the scheme?

- Northern Ireland Audit Office Report – Para 64..... *The Business Case included as a key feature and outcome that the Scheme would prevent clubs having to face the ‘imminent risk of closure’. Whilst we accept that this was not described as an assessment criterion, it does seem to have been one of the objectives of the Scheme.*

Why was this feature, that was part of the Business Case not included in the assessment criteria?

- Northern Ireland Audit Office Report – Para 64..... *The scheme was set up to provide funding to cover net losses. The outcome of this for some sporting bodies has been to ensure that profits made in previous years have been maintained in the COVID-19 restricted year. While we believe this is an unintended consequence of the Scheme, we consider it to be inappropriate for the public sector to underwrite profits in this way.*

Why was the scheme of public money allowed to underwrite profits as it did?

- What checks and audits took place on the applications to the Fund submitted by Clubs, Governing bodies and organisations?
- Were previously submitted annual accounts of Clubs, Governing bodies and organisations that submitted applications checked and verified against submitted information on the applications to the Fund?
- Were April – December 2020 Bank statements of the Clubs, governing bodies and organisations checked and verified with the applications to the Fund?
- What checks and audits were completed on applications to the Fund from clubs, governing bodies and organisations that hadn't previously submitted annual accounts to their respective governing authorities?
- Who carried out the checks and audits on the applications to the Fund submitted by Clubs, Governing bodies and organisations?

- Have individual clubs that were recipient of significant financial payments from the scheme and are alleged to have made huge profits in 2020 or had considerable financial reserves been investigated?

The group would appreciate the opportunity to present to the Public Accounts Committee on the matter.

They have also asked that consideration should be given to recommending a high percentage of audit checks on the successful applicants and recommending a Public Enquiry into all aspects of the Fund.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Barton MLA

This message has been sent by or on behalf of Rosemary Barton MLA

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