



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Investigation into Consistency in Child
Protection across the CAL Remit:
Sport NI/NSPCC Briefing

14 February 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr David Hilditch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mr Oliver McMullan

Witnesses:

Mr Paul Stephenson	NSPCC
Mr Paul Donnelly	Sport Northern Ireland
Mr Nick Harkness	Sport Northern Ireland

The Chairperson: I welcome Nick Harkness, Paul Donnelly and Paul Stephenson to discuss, from the perspective of Sport NI, the issues of child protection and safeguarding across the remit of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). You are very welcome. It is good to see you this morning. I apologise that so many members are absent. We do not normally have this problem. Do not take it personally. If you make an opening statement, we will follow up with some questions and a general conversation on the terms of reference of our investigation.

Mr Nick Harkness (Sport Northern Ireland): Thank you very much. I thank the Committee for the invitation to demonstrate how Sport NI, in partnership with an independent specialist organisation, namely the NSPCC, is proactively engaged with sporting organisations in promoting safeguarding in sport across Northern Ireland. I have with me Paul Donnelly, Sport Northern Ireland's policy, planning and research manager, and Paul Stephenson from the NSPCC, both of whom are responsible for the management, co-ordination and implementation of the safeguarding in sport services in Sport Northern Ireland, as provided by Sport Northern Ireland. Over the next 10 minutes or so, I will cover four areas: background to the area of safeguarding in sport; key improvements that we have seen over the period of our relationship with the NSPCC; key areas for future development; and shorter-term priorities for action.

The first area is background. Sport Northern Ireland has been working in partnership with the NSPCC's child protection in sport unit for over 10 years to encourage governing bodies of clubs and sports to implement the practice outlined in the 'Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport'. Sport Northern Ireland believes that encouraging all sporting organisations to implement the code will benefit everyone involved in children's sport in Northern Ireland, including parents, guardians, leaders and, of course, the children. Sport Northern Ireland, in partnership and consultation with a number of governing bodies of sport, has agreed that sports organisations

receiving funding will be assessed against the following safeguarding standards: safe recruitment and selection; effective management of staff and volunteers; reporting of concerns; codes of behaviours; sharing of information; and general safety and management arrangements.

Sport has the opportunity to be a positive influence on the promotion of children and vulnerable adults by providing supporting structures and a sporting environment that places welfare first. In 2001, Sport Northern Ireland entered into a formal agreement with the NSPCC to appoint a full-time children's safeguarding advisory officer, namely Paul Stephenson who is with us today. Over the past 10 or more years, a number of extraordinary achievements have been made in relation to safeguarding children and young people in sport. There have been over 1,000 children's safeguarding awareness and designated officer training courses. Over 10,000 coaches, volunteers and administrators have attended safeguarding training. All funded governing bodies of sport have received support from Sport Northern Ireland and the NSPCC on the implementation of the code of ethics, and a child safeguarding advisory service has been provided to governing bodies that are both funded and not funded, sports clubs that are both affiliated and non-affiliated and community organisations. Responses are made to approximately 300 queries per annum relating to the protection of young people.

In the period 2008-2011, child protection in sport services have been assessed through an independent post-project evaluation (PPE). In 2012, that PPE concluded that the NSPCC is well-established and recognised as a competent service provider in sport in Northern Ireland. Secondly, it concluded that, due to the effective services that have been provided, the NSPCC has built up significant trust and effective relationships with sporting infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

It is important to highlight to the Committee that, despite that progress, there is no room for complacency and further work is required to address the ever-changing environment. Recent technological advances — for example, the use of the internet and social media — require specialist advice to be given to sporting bodies. In that regard, Sport Northern Ireland believes that it would be useful to highlight to the Committee some of the areas that have been addressed to make sport a safe and enjoyable environment for all those involved. In so doing, I will highlight some key improvements that have been made over the past 10 years.

In relation to safeguarding improvements in the sports sector through the introduction of governing body audits, it has been possible to measure improvements in funded governing bodies' practices. The audits undertaken by the NSPCC provide each funded sport with a report on its current position in the area of child protection and provide clear recommendations for action. Around 70% of funded governing bodies of sport have attained a satisfactory level of assurance following their safeguarding audits. There are six standards for each sport, and each standard has three levels. The assessment is non-static. In other words, sports can move up and down based on their performance at their last audit. The simplest way to understand this assessment is as follows. The first level shows that organisations have the correct policies and procedures in place. The second level assesses whether the organisation has the processes to regularly communicate those practices to its coaches, young people and parents. Thirdly, it assesses whether the organisations have processes for checking whether their clubs are implementing the policies, procedures and advice properly.

All Sport Northern Ireland-funded governing bodies of sport working with children are required to have in place four things: effective systems and structures to report and respond to concerns about children's welfare; systems to prevent unsuitable adults from working with children; appropriate safeguarding training for those who work with children; and designated safeguarding children's officers at governing body level. Sport Northern Ireland has a network of 14 trained tutors who are responsible for delivering safeguarding training that is tailored to sports coaches and volunteers.

By way of demonstrating the impact in this area, members may wish to note that, since 1 April 2010, Sport Northern Ireland has delivered 266 safeguarding awareness workshops, which have engaged with 2,338 sports coaches, officials and volunteers from a wide range of stakeholder organisations across Northern Ireland. In addition, Sport Northern Ireland and the NSPCC have worked together to train sport-specific tutors in a number of different sports who, in turn, do their own training. Those sports include swimming, soccer, GAA, cycling and mountaineering. The GAA, for example, has delivered safeguarding training courses to a further 2,000 coaches in its own sport.

Sport Northern Ireland has developed a new club development and accreditation scheme called Clubmark. That scheme includes safeguarding children and young people as a key element and has resulted in better standards of practice in sports clubs throughout Northern Ireland. Sport Northern Ireland and the NSPCC have also supported a number of non-funded governing bodies of sport to

ensure that they have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place. Through the NSPCC, Sport Northern Ireland is able to ensure that the difficult subject of safeguarding is a means to encourage adults to get involved in sport rather than an obstacle. That is done by providing systems that protect them and the young people in their care.

However, as I said earlier, there are areas for further work and development. Sport Northern Ireland has identified five key areas for further work and development in relation to children's safeguarding in sport. The first is to continue to expand the current work on achieving and retaining the satisfactory level of assurance for funded governing bodies. Secondly, it is about encouraging governing bodies of sport to focus on a children's-rights approach to sports participation, where attention is paid to creating a positive sporting ethos and where children and young people are respected and their voices are heard and used to shape sporting experiences, welfare, policies and performances. Thirdly, we will promote the delivery of coaching the whole child, a workshop that builds on the social and emotional needs of young people involved in sport and promotes the importance of a positive sporting and coaching ethos. Fourthly, we will extend our current service provision to the sports sector through safeguarding standards to non-funded governing bodies in a way that is proportionate to the requirements on those organisations to achieve the minimum standards, while recognising the limited resources available to sport in the voluntary sector. Finally, we will look at other ways in which Sport Northern Ireland can link various areas of funding to training and safeguarding standards where relevant.

In addition, we hope to initiate some lower-level specific actions in the shorter term. First, Sport Northern Ireland will work to ensure that all funded governing bodies introduce — as it is called in the trade — acceptable users policies in relation to the use of social media and guidelines for communication with and between young people involved in sport. Secondly, Sport NI will use opportunities that sport provides to use sport as a tool to raise awareness of two issues that face children, young people and young adults in our communities today: self-harm and suicide. Sport Northern Ireland will work to ensure that governing bodies of sport recognise, in their structures, the importance of safeguarding high-performance young people. Finally, Sport Northern Ireland will continue to support governing bodies of sport to embed and maintain safeguarding practice in all their work with young people and vulnerable young adults.

To conclude, Sport Northern Ireland has been working in partnership with an independent specialist organisation — the NSPCC — and its stakeholders to raise awareness of child protection issues in sport. There has been a particular focus on the need for organisations to have a culture of vigilance, codes of conduct, good recruitment practice with proper vetting procedures and systems to ensure that young people are listened to and their concerns acted on.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. Do any of your colleagues wish to comment at this stage?

Mr Paul Donnelly (Sport Northern Ireland): Not at this stage.

The Chairperson: You are here this morning because the model that you have in place has been suggested to us as something that may and could be translated across the other aspects of the DCAL remit. What you have spoken of is particularly comprehensive. The fact that you have also identified that other things need to be done as you move forward is welcome. I am particularly interested in organisations that you work with that are not affiliated to governing bodies and may not receive direct funding from Sport NI. How do you reach such groups?

Mr Harkness: Sport NI prides itself on being a source of advice and guidance for a range of bodies, not just the affiliated ones. We take the approach that we are not just a cash machine for sport, and we provide advice and guidance, irrespective of the opportunity to attract funding. Through our work with NSPCC and Paul in particular, we have established a position of being seen to have an established code of practice and advice mechanisms and of being a one-stop shop in that regard for non-funded and funded alike. Paul advises us that he would deal with over 300 queries a year, including from non-funded or non-affiliated organisations. They may not necessarily be sporting bodies but youth organisations that use sport as a tool. Paul could answer that in more detail.

Mr Paul Stephenson (NSPCC): We work in partnership with a lot of organisations. I know that Volunteer Now is briefing you after us. Volunteer Now may direct a call to it from a sporting organisation to us. However, those are the organisations that are proactive in looking for advice. Your question was around how we reach those who may not be looking for advice. We do that through conferences and sport-specific events, at which we take exhibition stands and engage people

in conversation. We take other opportunities, such as coach education programmes, to go along and talk openly about safeguarding. At a local level, for example, Armagh sports partnership ran a coach education programme last year, at which we spoke for half an hour. We got queries after that because we reached out to those local clubs. Some of those clubs have well-run structures, but others that are involved in community sport, without an umbrella organisation, may not. It is about having that proactive approach and branding. We use marketing at different events. If events are coming up, we make sure that our stand and branding is there and that it is sport-specific.

The Chairperson: Will you talk about your reporting mechanism for young people involved in sport who may have issues?

Mr Stephenson: We report back to Sport NI quarterly. In those reports, we state the number of enquiries that we had and look at the standards process. In relation to case advice, I give Sport NI a summary — the numbers that we dealt with and some examples — rather than going into the details of those cases. Northern Ireland is quite small. What if I were to say that something happened involving a performance athlete in a particular sport, when there may be only three performance athletes involved in the sport concerned? To avoid identifying the person, it would be inappropriate to give that detail. Therefore, Sport NI gets information about the number of case advice enquiries I deal with but not necessarily the detail and the actual sports concerned. It is appropriate for that to stay within that sport and the statutory organisation.

Mr Donnelly: Just to add to what Paul said: I meet NSPCC representatives on a quarterly basis. The basis of those meetings is to assess performance against six key objectives that are set out in the context of the contract with NSPCC. Paul and his line manager, Anne Tiivas, attend those meetings.

The Chairperson: OK. What is in place in the structure in Sport NI that could be easily transferred — Paul may be able to comment on this — to other sectors across DCAL's remit?

Mr Stephenson: As Nick said earlier, it is, effectively, a one-stop shop. It has taken quite a few years to build up confidence within governing bodies and to understand the structures of governing bodies. I dropped a few clangers when I first started in the role and, perhaps, caused a bit of offence in certain sports. You need to build up confidence in people to trust you. Through the development of a network of designated officers at governing body level, we have seen the trust that has built up between those officers, who are sharing information and good practice. That was not there 10 years ago. There was an ethos where, say, people who were involved in judo would say that they wanted children to join their club and not to participate in other sports.

There has been a wider change of direction in Sport NI around young people's sports education, and people can transfer skills between certain sports. Skills, knowledge and experience are more openly transferred because there is more trust within the governing body structures. The organised training that is available is linked to local sports councils' development officers, so they know where they can go for accredited training and that, with a quick phone call, they can arrange training from a Sport NI tutor within three or four weeks.

Those procedures are already in place. It is a one-stop shop for advice, whether that is case advice, good practice advice or advice on away trips. We have even looked at issues around allergies that affect young people in sport, and at discrimination. We have looked at a lot of different specific issues, but for this particular sector. The language that is used is consistent within this sector, so that the sector can understand it. We are at the stage now where people are coming to us for information as opposed to feeling that things are being imposed on them, certainly at governing body level.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning. My point is related to a point that the Chair raised. Is there any communication between the other arm's-length bodies under DCAL's aegis on the issue of child protection? Is there any exchange of good practice and valuable experience, and so on? Is there any forum or mechanism for that?

Mr Stephenson: Not on a formal basis. One of the recommendations that we made before Christmas was that we would like DCAL to introduce that sort of structure. On their most recent visit to the Committee, DCAL officials indicated that they may well consider that. We have had calls from the language bodies, who have come to the NSPCC for advice. We get enquiries about the vetting and barring scheme, which is quite a complicated system, and we have assisted other arm's-length bodies when they have come to the NSPCC for that advice. However, there is no formal structure or sharing

of information. That is one of the things that we would like to see, and we would welcome the opportunity for other organisations to learn from the experiences of Sport NI.

Mr D Bradley: Obviously, museums, libraries, sports bodies and language bodies all have their specific approaches that have to be tailored to the types of situations in which young people and, indeed, adults are involved. However, there are common themes. For example, social media and the internet cross a lot of these situations. Do you think that it would be useful to have an annual or biennial conference on the issue between all the related arm's-length bodies of DCAL in order to exchange information, share good practice and keep up to date with situations, especially from the social media point of view, which is changing very rapidly month-by-month if not year-on-year?

Mr Harkness: Any opportunity to communicate issues that relate to the promotion of young people's safety would be welcome. Paul has already indicated that each sector will have its own sector-specific conferences and opportunities to learn and to disseminate information. Certainly, through the NSPCC, we use that in sporting terms. There are many different ways. However, no matter where you go, sport is generally structured through a hierarchy of bodies. You have a governing body, and, at a lower level, affiliated clubs that are required to comply with the policies of the governing body. That almost makes it slightly easier in this sector because the communication channel is there. There is a subservient relationship between the club and the governing body so that it can impose policies. It is not so hierarchical in all culture sector organisations; other culture sector organisations sit relatively independently and may not have a governing body. The fact that governing structures exist in sports helps us to communicate best practice.

Mr D Bradley: However, our terms of reference are gaps in child protection across the culture, arts and arts remit. Therefore, one would think that it is important that there is a sharing of those elements that I mentioned across the culture, arts and leisure family, let us call it, to ensure that what is learned in one sector is shared with another and that that is done as quickly as possible. Have you looked at systems outside Northern Ireland — in other parts of Ireland, the UK or internationally — from which we can learn good practice?

Mr Stephenson: Certainly. I am part of a national organisation, the NSPCC, so we have colleagues in England and Wales; we also work with Children 1st in Scotland, and we work very closely with the Irish Sports Council. It has a person who is responsible for the code of ethics. The blunt reality is that the UK is taking the lead on safeguarding in sport. My colleagues have been asked to speak at conferences, and I have spoken at international conferences. The child protection in sport unit is working with UNICEF, particularly in building up to the soccer world cup tournament in Brazil, and we have been asked to provide education there. Last week, my director was in America to speak at the Amateur Swimming Association conference. The lead is coming from the UK. The learning opportunities are coming from the work that is happening with sports governing bodies in the UK and also in the rest of Ireland.

The issue with the rest of Ireland is, I suppose, that we have robust safeguarding standards in Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. However, there are issues with a lack of cross-border consistency, which I think is purely down to resources. It is not to do with willpower, but with different resources in the Irish Sports Council. It does not have the capacity to review governing bodies to the same level that Sport NI has asked me to review standards of practice, and so on. We hear comments from Ulster branches of organisations in Northern Ireland that their Southern umbrella bodies are not being asked to adhere to the same standards of practice that we ask and expect from them. Therefore, in a positive way, through Sport NI's work, the Ulster branches are, quite often, taking the lead with their all-Ireland organisations and helping them along in their development.

Mr D Bradley: On that point about the cross-border issue, is there any mechanism for sharing information about people who are involved in sports coaching? For example, if someone moves from Munster to Ulster, is there a mechanism for ensuring that that person has not been identified for a breach of codes for safeguarding or protection?

Mr Stephenson: If they stay in the sport, there is. There have been cases of people involved in sport in the South of Ireland coming to sport in Ulster. When their vetting check had been done, they were put out of the sport in its entirety because of their criminal history and the robustness of the Ulster branch's procedures. If someone stays in a sport, there are procedures for sharing information, and so on. However, people can move between organisations. There is a formal, and quite robust, memorandum of understanding between the guards and the PSNI on sharing of information on high-risk offenders.

Mr D Bradley: There is quite a degree of, let us say, healthy rivalry between sports clubs, school teams, and so on in the social media. That is a good thing in many ways, because it increases the effort that players put into training and performance. Often, it comes to fever pitch approaching finals or derby matches. There have been examples of such rivalry spilling over into social media. Some of the comments are, let us say, not in the spirit of the sport or the code relevant to the occasion. That is an example of one aspect of social media, although it is something that we would prefer not to have. Are there strategies for dealing with such a situation?

Mr Harkness: That is one of the areas of work that we have highlighted in the short term; Paul has been working on it and can give you some information. Governing bodies and clubs alike need information. You will never control the individual who communicates via social networking with another individual. However, for formal communications and the style that club officials and adults in a club use and share with young members, we need to establish, share and sign up to codes of practice.

Mr Stephenson: It is work that we have been doing, as governing bodies have raised it as a need, as have parents because they have had concerns with some of the comments of coaches, as I said last week. There is a need for governing bodies to get assistance and advice. A major theme of a conference that we ran last September was social media and the need for acceptable-use policies in sports organisations. Some organisations have been proactive and have developed policies and have started communicating them to their stakeholders. Those are the organisations that have had incidents, and have tied themselves up in knots with disciplinary procedures and how to deal with comments made on social media that could have been made in private time. We are helping organisations to move to an understanding of the implications. However, most people at governing body level are my age or older, and we did not grow up with social media; we use it for a purpose and we set it down. We do not live with it in the same way that many young people do, as a third arm, effectively. It is about taking on that understanding as adults. Simply saying, "Do not say that; do not do that", is not enough when communicating with young people. We need to look at how we get the message out to the young people whom we can reach through sport.

Mr D Bradley: If there is good practice among clubs and sporting bodies, and young people see comments made in the proper spirit, there is a chance that they will be influenced by that.

The Chairperson: Technology can be used in a very positive way as well. It is my understanding that the Irish Football Association (IFA) is developing an application.

Mr Stephenson: It is looking at developing a safeguarding app. One issue raised last week was how you update people on safeguarding and good practice information because it is ever-changing. The IFA is looking at developing a safeguarding app through Jim Gamble's new company, Inequ; it is looking to promote that, eventually, through FIFA. To go back to your comment, it will promote best practice through a world organisation. That process has just started. I think that the IFA has just agreed to draw up a contract for it. It has not actually been developed yet, but a safeguarding coach will go on a safeguarding course and then be given access to the app; they will save the app and get updated, relevant information and source information for the site. The app will use head shots, for example, of people talking about what good practice is. It will be interactive.

The Chairperson: Once developed, it could be rolled out across a variety of sectors.

Mr Stephenson: It is certainly something that the IFA has already planned to promote through a European football journal. It would then also include FIFA to share demonstrations of good practice.

Mr Hilditch: Dominic touched on the issue that I wanted to raise: where we sit in the European league and even among United Kingdom jurisdictions. Were we benchmarking? Were we providing good practice or were we looking for good practice in other places? I think that you covered that fairly well, Paul. Are there concerns about the thousands of young people who regularly leave our shores to take part in sports in other jurisdictions?

Mr Stephenson: Yes. That is why we are trying to work with committees in the International Olympic Committee and in certain sports governing bodies. There are concerns about poor practice that would not be accepted in the UK or in Ireland, and when they go abroad, they have to adhere to that. For example, at weigh-ins for international boxing competitions in some Eastern bloc countries, a young

person is expected to weigh in naked. However, that is against the rules in the UK and Ireland, so there is an issue about weight category there. It is the same in the States. The international standards are not there, but, through the work with our governing bodies here, we are looking to pilot international standards through some targeted organisations and through UNICEF and to roll those out.

One of my colleagues was speaking to Olympic coaches in China. It is not appropriate for us to go out and say that they are not allowed to walk on children's backs, because that is how they get their elite athletes, but we are saying that it is not appropriate to be violent towards children, so the language is slightly different, because we need to tailor it for our audience. We are looking to influence international bodies, because it has an impact when our young people go out to training camps or competitions.

Mr Hilditch: Are organisations or clubs encouraged to seek advice before arranging travel to certain countries?

Mr Stephenson: They do seek advice. I get calls from governing bodies and individual clubs that have been directed to me from their governing body if it cannot respond. That is one of the things that we have noticed over the past number of years. That is where you see the proactive message of safeguarding coming across. People are starting to think about those things, as opposed to waiting until a disaster happens while they are away. They are planning much better for their away trips; they are considering the implications of travelling with young people, not just permission slips but accommodation and supervision at social events, for example.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thank you for the presentation. I am thinking about Sport NI's role as a governing body, its procedures, codes of conduct and ethics and how you continually test their robustness. What happens when there are breaches, and how many incidents have there been? What does Sport NI do? Are they all reported to you? How do you respond?

Mr Harkness: We give ourselves assurance from the fact that Sport NI has contracted with an independent expert body. A body that is seen as a leader — not just in the UK but further afield — gives us confidence that our systems, procedures and advice are being updated by an expert body that is independent of us.

Mr Stephenson: We have been working for a number of years to skill up designated officers at governing body levels to deal with many of the disciplinary issues that can be dealt with within organisations. I am fairly certain that if there is a child protection issue, most governing bodies would now seek advice from external organisations. I may hear from those organisations at a later stage or they may contact me for that nudge or bit of advice before they move on to statutory organisations. However, I do not necessarily capture that. Last year, we did a pilot with sports, using a recording system similar to the one that I use myself, and asked them to start capturing information on a six-monthly basis to see what that would look like and how difficult it was for them to start to capture the case advice; the number of vetting checks; the number of people who have been trained; the number of inquiries about away trips; and the number of bullying issues.

As we move to the next stage of getting sports to implement their procedures, that is one of the key things that we will ask them to have internally. I have met some governing bodies that are starting to look at their own internal recording systems so that they can capture information. It is right and proper that I do not get all the issues, because I have competent people in safeguarding in certain sports. We have principal social workers, former inspectors from the police public protection units and people who are experienced in child protection who can deal with issues and with external organisations. However, some will still come to me. I will record them, but I will not capture them all, because it is right that they are dealt with by the governing body and the statutory organisation.

Ms McCorley: If an incident of abuse happened, would the organisation or body look to the procedures and code of conduct to see whether there is a gap? Do you look to see whether we have a robust enough set of —

Mr Harkness: Lessons learned, really?

Ms McCorley: Why did that happen? Where did we go wrong?

Mr Stephenson: Yes. They sometimes need more encouragement than others. I will meet one sport in a few weeks' time to look at its disciplinary procedures because they are not set up to capture information from young people and parents effectively. They are about rule breaking as opposed to breaches of the code of conduct and are perhaps not as robust as they could be. It has learnt from having to deal with a very minor issue that has become very complex because both parties went to a solicitor. It has cost a great deal of money as well. It is starting to look at its procedures to see how it could deal with that more appropriately. That is appropriate learning, and we are using it as an example for our next lead officer meeting in Dundalk. We are using those examples to look at how we can get what governing bodies say is good practice down to clubs and to educate people at club level on dealing with lower-level disciplinary issues that they should be dealing with in that organisation. That is an example of people putting their hands up and saying, "We need to review this and amend it". They regularly come to us with that. We get cases where parents say, "I do not feel that this organisation has followed its procedures; I feel that there has been a breach." In that case, we liaise with the governing body to see how the issue can be resolved. Those issues come to me directly.

Ms McCorley: How can we feel assured that, where there are gaps or breaches, information will be shared and policies and procedures amended?

Mr Stephenson: All sports governing bodies that I have raised an issue with have flexibility in their policies and procedures if they need to be amended. I could not say that that was the case six or seven years ago. If an issue comes to my attention now from a parent or a coach working with an organisation, when I go back to the governing body, it is willing to listen.

Ms McCorley: I am not being critical; I am trying to encourage people to be practical. We live in a changing world, and the nature of bullying has changed through social media. We have to keep learning and updating procedures and policies to take account of that, because it is different from how incidents happened before.

You mentioned the coaching the whole child course. Can you tell us more about that?

Mr Stephenson: Yes, because I was on the course last night as a guinea pig. It is a new course that Sport NI is rolling out on the back of research by UK Sport. It builds on the coaching courses from Sport NI but looks particularly at the personal social element of coaching and the relationships that can evolve in sport. It looks at, for example, how young people connect with one another through sport and how they can be creative in sport through changing certain basic rules in warm-up exercises and allowing young people to think for themselves. When coaches look at planning a coaching session, they should consider what elements of creativity and connection they are introducing. It is called the five Cs; I cannot remember all five of them exactly.

Mr Donnelly: If it helps, we are happy to share information on the course with the Committee to inform your investigation.

Mr Stephenson: It is a relatively new course, but it is about reaching out and using sport as an opportunity to engage young people through the coaches. It looks at citizenship as well.

Mr McMullan: It is nice to see you again. I have a few questions. First, what is a "vulnerable young adult"?

Mr Stephenson: The Volunteer Now representatives are probably better able to respond to that than we are, because their organisation is commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work on training for vulnerable adults. Very few vulnerable adults will be involved in sport because of the definition of a "vulnerable adult". It is really only through the Special Olympics that people termed "vulnerable adults" will be involved in sporting activities. For example, just because you have a disability does not mean that you are automatically a vulnerable adult, and just because you are of a certain age does not mean that you are a vulnerable adult as per the legal definition. Disability Sport NI is being proactive and is working with people who have disabilities, but those people are not legally termed "vulnerable adults".

Mr McMullan: Why can we not use the term "special needs" along with "disability"; that is what we are talking about in reality. You were quite right in what you said about a vulnerable young adult. The term that needs to be used is "special needs". I say that because "special needs" and "disability" are two different facets of a particular life. We can work with disability, and we know what it is, but the

same cannot be said of special needs. Special needs is a complex area and has many facets. It worries me that people who are trained to work with vulnerable young adults are not being trained to look for signs of the complex issues involved with special needs, such as behavioural problems etc. It is not always easy, but I would always like to see "special needs" written in there along with "disability", but it is always left out. It is left out because it is complex and "vulnerable adults" is easier to get round. We are not addressing the problem correctly.

Mr Donnelly: I was at last week's meeting, and I picked up on some of the points that you made. In our briefing, we probably did not use the words that you require. However, as an organisation, we have both the Special Olympics and Disability Sports Northern Ireland heavily involved in the auditing process. In particular, Special Olympics Ulster has received a satisfactory level of assurance through that process. Therefore, it has significant and robust procedures in place for safeguarding.

We have taken a step further and have been proactive with the NSPCC and produced a resource to support those working with children who are disabled or deaf and who are involved in sport. That is being rolled out over the next number of years through the NSPCC. We are doing various things in the area of disability and are targeting people who have special needs. The problem is that we did not have enough room to put that in the briefing note.

Mr McMullan: That is the problem: there never is enough room for it. If you listened to the meeting last week, which you referred to, you will know my concern and the answers that I got. It is timely that the video came today and was not here last week; that is what I take issue with. It is not something that I would like to see in the report per se; many people would like to see it. You have robust structures, and I know of them first hand. However, when they filter down to club level, they sometimes get lost. I congratulate you on some of the things that you are doing.

Mr Donnelly: I am happy to leave the resource issue with you as well.

Mr Stephenson: In the standards process, a governing body will not move from limited to satisfactory level unless it has looked at disability and special needs and has an inclusion plan. That is one of the safeguarding requirements that we ask for: an organisation will not move up to that level without doing so. That is one of the areas in which we are working with governing bodies. We are not specialists in the area, but we know about safeguarding, so we direct organisations to Disability Sport NI and ask it to look at an inclusion plan for people with disabilities.

We are seeing fantastic practice from some grassroots organisations on inclusion, and some of the governing bodies are learning from that, taking good practice and putting it into advice to other clubs. It is right and proper that they do that.

Mr McMullan: One of the other things that you hit on is that a lot of those children and adults are stated through the health issue. The category that they are stated in will carry on with them into sport. That is why I use the words "special needs and disability". They are two different categories.

You have a great chance, with the review of public administration (RPA) coming up, to introduce your robust structures into the new councils. Have you thought about RPA? I notice that, when we spoke about the facilities, we did not mention the urban/rural dichotomy. There is a big difference as to what is available in urban and rural contexts. We did not speak about the complexities of having to travel to avail oneself of facilities.

Mr Harkness: Sorry, is your question specifically about child protection issues under RPA?

Mr McMullan: Yes. The number of councils will be reduced to 11.

Mr Harkness: We are already working with the 11-council model through the active communities programme, and we are funding around 110 full-time equivalent coaches, who are deployed in local communities, many of them through local government or governing bodies contracted to local government. Therefore, child protection policies will be embedded in their work, and that is a priority for us and will remain so. That is work that we are already doing.

Mr McMullan: Where does the urban/rural thing sit with your forward work plan?

Mr Harkness: One of the aspirations in the strategy for sport is that, if I remember correctly, 80% of our population should live within 20 minutes travelling time of a quality-accredited facility. That aspiration will apply to people living in a rural environment as well as an urban one. In the coming years, we will prioritise capital investment so that that target is built into capital programmes to promote that aspiration.

Mr McMullan: You will have the urban/rural thing built in?

Mr Harkness: Absolutely.

Mr McMullan: That is good. When the Murphy report came out, we set up the child protection in sport unit. Is there anything in the report's recommendations that now needs to be changed? Should we revisit it or look at getting that work revamped?

Mr Stephenson: I think that most of the recommendations were responded to. The Irish Sports Council and Sport NI developed a code of ethics and good practice for children's sport. It is an all-Ireland document that put in place good practice examples and advice. A lot of it was about raising awareness and changing the culture of organisations when it came to reporting procedures. We think that we have answered most of the recommendations. I will have to go back and look at them, but part of the code of ethics unit in the Irish Sports Council and the development of child protection issue in Northern Ireland were in response to the Murphy report to make sure that we had services for the sports sector. Behind the report, there was the need to change cultures in organisations, and that work is ongoing. We now have procedures in place, but the need is for individuals to use those procedures appropriately. We need to do continuous training and education for that.

Mr McMullan: The reason why I asked you that question was that, earlier, you said that there is a gap among the organisations. You said that procedures here are more robust than those of the Irish Sports Council. If the Murphy report was produced as a joint report at that time, it tells me that there is a widening gap and that we need to be looking at this on an all-Ireland basis again very soon. Have you plans to do that? The report has been sitting there, and you have admitted to yawning gaps between the two. That is something that we need to look at.

Mr Stephenson: I have a meeting next Tuesday morning with my colleagues in the Irish Sports Council. However, this is purely down to resources. The Irish Sports Council will listen with a very sympathetic ear. The standards that we have used are based on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety-sponsored 'Getting It Right', led by Volunteer Now.

We consulted on the process of using those standards, their order and their language. We consulted with all-Ireland organisations and with the Irish Sports Council to ensure that, if they were used, they could be used by any organisation on the island of Ireland. The difference is that, in Northern Ireland, Sport NI requires sporting organisations to attain them, whereas for governing or umbrella bodies in Dublin or Cork, they are merely good practice. That is the challenge for some of our Ulster branches, which say that they step up to the mark but that there is a different requirement when they go to competitions or an all-Ireland open or whatever in the South. You are quite right: there are issues that should be tightened on an all-Ireland basis.

Mr McMullan: Will it be one of your programmes to take forward the Murphy report, get it upgraded and made more uniform, on an all-Ireland basis?

Mr Stephenson: It is not specifically about the Murphy report. Times have changed. We have moved beyond a lot of the recommendations. What we are doing now on standards was not in the Murphy report. We have moved beyond a lot of its recommendations to even fuller best practice. The issue is that the Ulster region has moved slightly beyond many all-Ireland bodies. That is not the same for every sport. For many sports on an all-Ireland basis, however, we have moved beyond what sports are asked to do in the South of Ireland.

There is a very robust system in Northern Ireland. The safeguarding requirement in the South of Ireland is purely about whether you are registered with the gardaí central vetting unit. That is the only question that a funded governing body is asked about affiliation.

Mr McMullan: I wish you luck for next Tuesday. I look forward to hearing the outcome of that one.

Mr McGimpsey: Apologies for being late. This may have been covered, but your paper states:

"To gain accreditation through the programme clubs are required to evidence a club safeguarding policy being in place, trained designated officers, all coaches and volunteers in contact with children and young people attending the awareness workshop and subject to safe recruitment procedures including Access NI checks."

Do you have a register of the clubs that have done that? As you know, if youngsters want to join their local table tennis club, badminton club or whatever, it can create anxiety. Parents should be able to look at a register through Sport Northern Ireland to see that the club is properly accredited. Do you do that on a club basis? Do you do it in an individual basis? Sometimes, it may not be a club but a tennis coach or an individual. Is there a register for that as well? Is it available to the general public?

Mr Donnelly: Yes. The Clubmark NI resource is available on our website. The scheme has been in operation for only the past 16 months or so. Around 100 clubs have been accredited. The information on those clubs is available on the website. We also have around 300 clubs that have almost received their accreditation. Alongside that, 27 different schemes operate at a local council and sport-specific level. A number of sports governing bodies operate their own club accreditation scheme. In their sport, they offer information about the clubs in their local areas. That is available to anyone who wants to become involved in a club.

A consortia of councils operate their own schemes to accredit local sports clubs in their respective area. Information on those clubs is available locally and electronically on their website.

Mr McGimpsey: That sounds quite confusing. You are going by sports, clubs and Sport Northern Ireland. The thing has developed through the protection of children and vulnerable adults (PoCVA), safeguarding, Access Northern Ireland and all the rest of it. Is it not sensible to have something like a central register for all sports clubs, whatever the code? Moreover, would it not be sensible to have a register of individual coaches so that parents can check that the club that their children want to join is on your club register? You said that you have 100 on your register and 300 —

Mr Donnelly: On their way.

Mr McGimpsey: How many clubs are we talking about in Northern Ireland in total?

Mr Donnelly: We anticipate that around 3,500 or 4,000 clubs exist in Northern Ireland. As I said, the scheme is new. It is up and running.

Mr McGimpsey: I understand that. Part of the issue is that, by the time that you get up to speed with all your clubs, there will be a new PoCVA or Access Northern Ireland, and away we go again. At 16 months, you are at 100, with 300 pending. If that is the rate of consumption, we are many years away from getting everybody, if you ever manage that. Would it not be a sensible approach to have a central register for all clubs and coaches?

Mr Donnelly: Sorry. Perhaps I was not clear with you at the beginning. We do have a central register. It is on our website. All the clubs that receive accreditation, whether it be through Sport NI's accreditation programme —

Mr McGimpsey: But you are saying that there are 100 on it. That is out of 3,500.

Mr Donnelly: Yes. As they are assessed, and as they attain accreditation, they will be included on the list.

Mr McGimpsey: Do we need a central registering body that can give us accreditation on a club-by-club basis? Regardless of the code, the principle and process is the same, and the outcome that we desire is the same. Parents should have comfort when their children join a club that the club is accredited, regardless of the code.

Is the registration of coaches also not a responsibility? I am not talking about just the coaches that you have, because then you would have to go somewhere else, and so on. You would be all over the show, if there are 3,500. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Would that not be a sensible way to go forward?

Mr Stephenson: The Clubmark scheme was launched recently, but, even before that, a lot of sports were already working towards best practice. They already had vetting standards in place. Therefore, if parents want to clarify something, they should go directly to that sport's governing body. It will be able to tell them whether that coach has got insurance and affiliation. There are issues with private coaches who are not affiliated to an organisation and who do not have an umbrella body vetting them. However, it is almost down to public and parental education to ensure that the parent chooses somebody who is affiliated and insured.

Clubmark, as rolled out, has a lot of elements, some of which are safeguarding elements. The vast majority of governing bodies, and certainly all those funded governing bodies, have robust vetting systems in place. They are rolling those out to clubs. Last week, mention was made of almost scaring volunteers off. We are trying to do this in a way that brings volunteers on board with us. The Kitemark scheme uses a visual image. It is a branding image. Most clubs that have gone through it have used their local press to promote it to parents. Over time, we will try to see more and more clubs come forward voluntarily, rather than have us make the Clubmark compulsory.

I move now to your question around vetting. The vetting of coaches in the funded governing bodies is an affiliation requirement and predates the introduction of Clubmark. Clubmark captures a lot more issues around safeguarding and good practice. It captures consultation with parents and good practice as well. It would probably be best if a central list of all coaches who are vetted were done by the individual governing bodies, who know the individuals.

Mr McGimpsey: I am looking at this from a parent's point of view. That all sounds logical, from your point of view. You know the sector, and so on, but parents do not. They want somewhere that they can go and look, and I am suggesting a central register. If, as you say, all those clubs are already up to speed, there would not be a great effort required in any of this. As far as coaches are concerned, there is no great effort in any of this. They could be on a register so that parents could see whether a particular coach was registered. If a coach is registered, they are happy. If the coach is not registered, they are not happy. They would also be able to see whether a club was registered. Surely that is a sensible way to go forward. In fact, it would be a piece of work that Sport Northern Ireland could very usefully do for the entire sports sector, rather than leave it to individual governing bodies, with parents contacting them and getting all sorts of mixed messages. Some bodies are better than others. There is another issue around individual coaches.

Would that not be a sensible way to do this? It seems logical to me. If you want to be involved in working with children, it makes it easier if individuals and clubs are on the register, and to have a central register.

Mr Stephenson: A number of years ago, there was a commitment from the Department of Health to launch an accreditation scheme. Volunteer Now was involved in the pilot of that scheme. It would have been not only for sports but a Northern Ireland-wide accreditation scheme, so you would work to certain standards. However, the Department has rolled back on that commitment. It would have looked at safeguarding commitments across all voluntary organisations, not just sport. You would have put yourself forward voluntarily.

Mr McGimpsey: That is the history. We are talking about now, and we are talking about sport. Would that not be a sensible way to go forward?

Mr Harkness: It is a suggestion that needs some consideration. It is a valuable suggestion, and it is something that we would want to explore.

Mr McGimpsey: It is for the benefit of individual parents.

Mr Harkness: We need to make sure that we do not end up with two levels of information, and poor communication between the two. We do not want to have a situation in which a governing body has a register and we have a register, and, for whatever reason, something changes on that registration, whether it is to do with an individual or a club, and that change is not being reflected. The more channels of communication that you have on the same thing, the danger is that one becomes out of date.

Mr McGimpsey: That is the whole point of the register. There are all those different channels of information. Have one channel, and that should —

Mr Harkness: The governing bodies are affiliated bodies. It is worth looking at the strengths and weaknesses, and seeing whether there are opportunities.

Mr McGimpsey: It would also be a requirement for them to register with you, and that is the point.

Mr Harkness: It could be. That is a possibility, yes.

Mr D Bradley: When the Arts Council was here last week, I asked about private tutors who teach, say, instrumental music in their own home. They are not covered by the legislation. What about private tutors who take modern dance classes and hire out the local sports centre for those classes? Are they covered?

Mr Harkness: Modern dance is not an area that I am familiar with. Coaches who hold —

Mr McGimpsey: It is not a sport.

Mr Harkness: Scottish country dancing is recognised as a sport, though. However, let us stick to more recognised sporting disciplines. A sports coach who holds a qualification will, in all circumstances that I can think of, have that accreditation and that qualification through the governing body, and built into that qualification process will have been the requirement to be exposed to safeguarding practices as part of the qualification. The governing bodies that we are working with to achieve higher and higher standards will have those child protection training opportunities built into their coaching education programmes.

Mr Stephenson: To go back to your question about hiring facilities, and it is the same for hiring church facilities or community halls in rural areas, it is almost down to that facility provider. Through the new structures that will be in place, there should be a level of consistency around facility providers and those who hire them out, whether that is to a well-run football club with 15 coaches or to dance teachers.

Mr D Bradley: They should require some sort of —

Mr Harkness: I believe that there would be a legal duty on an organisation — a council or whatever — hiring a facility for a purpose to ensure that it was being used properly and in a controlled manner for the purpose for which it was hiring it. I imagine that they would require evidence of a coaching qualification. That coaching qualification would, in turn, give them confidence that, behind that qualification, there was an exposure to child protection training.

Mr Hilditch: I know that Paul mentioned the inconsistencies with local government last week. Perhaps, Nick, that would not be exactly right, to be fair.

Mr Harkness: I am just saying that I would imagine that organisations have an obligation. Whether they do it or not is something else. However, I perceive that there is an obligation on them.

Mr Stephenson: A level of consistency of at least a minimum standard around the requirement to ensure that there is a safeguarding and vetting policy is certainly something that we would like to see taken forward.

Mr McMullan: What you said at the end goes back to my urban and rural thing. Your paper states:

"Under the governance investment stream Sport NI plans to make it a compulsory requirement for all sports governing bodies to develop an implementation plan to ensure their safeguarding message is imbedded at club level."

When you said that you took it that councils or such bodies should have all of that in place, do we not know?

Mr Harkness: Councils, as you know, are independent bodies with their own insurance and stuff. I have no control over the bookings that a particular council or a range of other organisations might have for a facility. However, if you are allowing a group to use your facility, there is an obligation to ask some questions about whether it will be put to a purpose that it is fit to be put to and that it is being put to that purpose by competent people — people with a coaching qualification. The safeguarding policies that we are talking about are to do with the funded governing bodies of sports — the organisations that run the activities, and, in turn, train and qualify the coaches and have subservient clubs within them. We are talking about within the governing bodies of sport and not within the organisation.

Mr McMullan: When you say "compulsory requirement", what is the teeth behind that? If it is compulsory, and you do not —

Mr Donnelly: Investment.

Mr McMullan: You do not give funding if you do not —

Mr Donnelly: It could certainly be a stumbling block for a sport if it did not meet the safeguarding expectations.

Mr Stephenson: In some cases, that investment has not been released in the time frame that was initially agreed because organisations had not provided evidence of that, which was one of the motivations for them to produce particular evidence around a particular area.

Mr McMullan: I come back to the issue of councils. We will have 11 councils after RPA. We are hoping that councils will run checks and balances on bodies that hire their halls to run classes —

Mr Harkness: To check that they are competent to use the facility for that purpose.

Mr McMullan: Should there not be something that allows us, at the touch of a button, to know whether that is in there or not. If anything ever happens, we will be running about chasing our tails to see whom to point the finger at instead of having it all there so that there is none of that and we are able to move quickly to protect not only children but their families and all those concerned.

Mr Donnelly: That focus was on governing bodies. We have been investing in the consortia of councils in Northern Ireland. As part of that investment process, we audit the safeguarding policies and procedures that those council consortia have in place. They will not receive any moneys from us unless they have those policies and procedures in place. We have an indication of what is happening out there around policies. We could not get down to the level of understanding whether they have procedures in place for a sports club or private coach. However, in the context of the work that they are doing to meet our and their own objectives, we can say that a particular council has in place its policies and procedures.

Mr McMullan: I am just concerned about how you protect vulnerable adults when we do not have those checks and balances at that level? That is where a lot of the sporting training and development starts, and there is a gap there.

Mr Stephenson: We would welcome a level of consistency so that a duty manager taking a booking looks to that form and makes sure that it is completed robustly, and proportionately for someone who is coming in once a week. If such procedures or systems are not in place for individuals, the local council must support them or direct them to where they can get advice and training. What will be the umbrella body to vet those organisations? In a few weeks, I will meet the Northern Ireland Sports Forum's executive to look at how to support some of the smaller voluntary sports organisations, which will no longer be allowed to use Access NI because of the numbers that they put through. The forum may look at acting as an umbrella for those organisations. Therefore, hopefully systems are developing to support the smaller organisations.

Mr D Bradley: Oliver's point is a good one, because an ad hoc group of people can book a sports hall for, say, five-a-side football, which falls outside your remit. Are there checks and balances to ensure that the age group of the players is not such that they could be vulnerable, and so on? I expect that that is something that we could share with the Environment Committee when we finish this work, because it is a council issue, and that Committee may want to ensure that there is no policy gap.

Mr Stephenson: Yes.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Paul, Nick and Paul. That was a very good session. We covered a lot of ground. We will review the Hansard report, and if there are issues that we wish to follow up on, we may do so by phone or in correspondence. I would appreciate your responding to that.

Mr Harkness: Thank you for the opportunity.