



Susan Hall AM
Chairman of the Economy Committee

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Matthew Ryder,
Deputy Mayor, Social Integration, Social Mobility, Community Engagement

Dear Matthew,

Response to the draft Sports Strategy consultation

Thank you for taking the time to appear in front of the Economy Committee to discuss your draft Sports Strategy.

The strategy sets out very ambitious goals in terms of promoting and making the most of London's incredible sporting infrastructure to attract more world class events to the city and using the power of sporting activity to support social integration, boost activity rates and generate economic activity.

Clarity over key partners

At the heart of the Strategy is the Sport Unites fund, a new £8.8 million community sports programme. We welcome how it has been developed through extensive research and reflection upon the lessons to be learned from other such programmes from across the world.

However, a large part of this fund is going to Comic Relief and it is unclear from the Strategy exactly what that money will be used for, how it will be used to support the goals and objectives of two very different organisations and, crucially, how the governance and accountability of that pot of money will work. It would be helpful if the final Strategy could answer those questions.

Likewise, with the level of funding that is going to the Laureus project, the lack of detail as to what exactly they do, how their programmes work, and what measures of success they are able to demonstrate is slightly disconcerting. Again, the final Strategy could usefully set that out in more detail.

The vision

As a strategy document it is right that it sets out a vision for what the Mayor is hoping to achieve, high-level goals and some indication of how those goals will be achieved. Many members of the Committee, however, want to see a more detailed description of how you imagine programmes funded to support social integration will actually achieve those goals. You set out how you want Sport Unites to tackle and target “particular issues” rather than specific groups or communities and that you would be looking at programmes that did that explicitly. The Strategy, however, fails to set out what those “issues” might be. If you are taking an “issues” based approach to drive the allocation of your funding, then it would be helpful if the final Strategy set out what those “issues” are. More broadly it would help partners better understand the vision for the Strategy if you could give examples of successful programmes that specifically support social integration, what they do and how they demonstrate success.

There are, as always with programmes of this kind, concerns about the ability to define and effectively measure social integration. Participation rates are an important indicator of the extent to which the programmes are getting buy-in from the local community, but they cannot be the only metric used to define success. Indeed, the rationale behind the numbers set out as to how many “beneficiaries” you would expect to gain from a particular programme is unclear and we would welcome greater clarification where possible.

Targeting inactive Londoners, by promoting the daily mile and building physical activity into daily life, should connect into the Transport strategy and healthy streets. All sports venues, swimming pools and gyms, for example, should be safely and conveniently accessible on foot, bike and by public transport. The Mayor should audit these existing venues and encourage the boroughs to introduce measures such as protected bike lanes, zebra crossings and dropped kerbs, for example, which would integrate the healthy street agenda into the Sports Strategy.

Sport Unites

Other concerns we have relate particularly to how Sport Unites will fund programmes that don't just try to get as many people as possible “through the door”, but reach out beyond those traditional groups already active in sports – such as young men. We would welcome some practical examples of any programmes that you have already funded that support groups such as seniors or young people with Special Education Needs to get active but also to be with people outside of that cohort – that surely is the true measure of social integration?

Part of the way forward may be to raise the role of big professional venues, such as the NSC building in Crystal Palace, that provide community access to professional sporting facilities. The importance of these venues and access to professional sports seems to be absent in the Strategy. Likewise, while we recognise that much of the Olympic legacy follows from the commercial deals that were done by a former Mayor agreed at the time of the Olympics, we would like to see the Mayor maximise the Olympic legacy by ensuring ordinary Londoners can access professional sports via these Olympic sporting venues.

One of the most inspiring elements of the Olympic project was the engagement of Londoners volunteering at sporting events. We are glad to see that Sport Unites embraces this legacy of volunteering which is so productive for building strong community.

One area that could be developed further in the Strategy is the issue of how Sport Unites will fund programmes, perhaps allied with other actions in the Strategy, that will support those on low levels of income to take part in sporting activity or to watch world class events. As the Strategy notes it is often those with less disposable income that are the most inactive or least engaged.

Working with schools and grass roots organisations

The Strategy also seems to be missing a piece around support for young people transitioning from primary to secondary school. As you recognize, there is a significant tailing off of activity amongst some young people as they move from a situation where P.E. is part and parcel of the curriculum and largely about having fun to a situation where sporting activity becomes more serious and competitive. We understand that you are working with, or funding some, third sector groups that go into schools and work with young people but the examples you give of cricket and boxing are traditional sports with a limited appeal. There may be scope for Sport Unites to fund programmes within specific schools that support young people to try a variety of sports and then sustain a level of investment for that school if those classes prove popular. Now is the time for the Mayor to support some creative thinking and innovation to help reach those young people who may have turned away from sporting activity.

While we welcome the focus on working at a grassroots level and building up your programmes from community-led initiatives where possible, Members would like to better understand how you will ensure that the grants you give will work with the grain of grant-giving from other organisations that might be working in that space and in that local area or with that community and also, crucially, how you will avoid duplication. This may not be something for the Strategy as such but should be part of the application documents that go to potential bidders.

A further issue that requires more thought before the final Strategy is launched is around whether Sport Unites could offer small pots of capital funding that could be used to repair, restore or enhance community assets that require some “TLC” and which can help local groups develop their capacity to expand their offer. While Members recognise the reluctance of Sport Unites to start providing capital grants or move into a space that is rightfully the responsibility of the local authority, it might be that there need to be clearly established pathways, set out in the Strategy, for how community groups could look to access other sources of what may be labelled as regeneration funding – such as through the Good Growth Fund or through a crowdfunding platform supported by the Mayor.

The Strategy sets great store on the value of micro-grants as a way of supporting individuals who can inspire and make things happen within their very, very local area. Clearly there is going to be tension between trying to support and nurture very local initiatives and the

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need to ensure due diligence and the effective use of public money and so there is, as you acknowledge, further work to do to establish robust criteria for grant-giving.

While there is scope for a certain level of risk to be borne in these areas where the Mayor wishes to try something new, and to support some initiatives that might not be linked into a big organisation, there needs to be a degree of transparency so that the public have confidence not just in that one small grant but in the programme as a whole.

To that end we would welcome you including within the final Strategy a commitment to provide for this Committee, on an annual basis, an update of what projects are being funded that year, why they were chosen, their criteria for success and how they are supporting your overarching goal of boosting activity and supporting social integration. This will enable effective public monitoring of the progress of the programme and also create a valuable library of examples of programmes that can be used by other organisations as part of their research for anything similar they would like to run.

We trust that you will take our comments into account in the development of the final Strategy.

I look forward to reading your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Hall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a distinct 'H'.

Susan Hall
Chairman, Economy Committee