



## Coronavirus and Sports Councils / ClubSport Networks Engaging Local Politicians

During these unprecedented times and looking to the future when Scotland does begin to recover from the coronavirus outbreak, Sports Councils and ClubSport networks have a hugely important and significant role to play at a local level. Especially when it comes to your unique role of being the **voice of sport** and engaging directly with local politicians, when they will have many difficult decisions ahead.

Sports Councils and ClubSport networks must work with local sports clubs and organisations, as the people on the ground it is you and your members who are most involved in club and community sport and are best placed to talk about the aspects of sport local politicians need to be aware of and made to care about.

As 'sport' is not a statutory service provision, local politicians may not prioritise this and are likely to spend more time on statutory areas of provision such as education, health and social work services. Linking the importance and impact club and community sport can and will have to these priority areas is essential, especially at this time when the population have little or no access to sport, physical activity or exercise. People's mental health will be significantly impacted, and many will feel more socially isolated than ever.

For Sports Councils and ClubSport networks, building political contacts is a valuable service for clubs and organisations within local communities, especially with an unpredictable future ahead. Many of you have existing relationships with your local politicians. For those of you with no political relationship, now more than ever is the time to start building these. You are the voice for sport across the local authority area, which means individual clubs and organisations don't have to build these relationships individually and you can support your members to raise issues, share challenges and overcome barriers together.

Raising your profile at this time is key. Use your social media and websites to share your benefits, invite new clubs and organisations to affiliate and highlight the importance of the role you have as the voice for sport and your unique links with local politicians. Work in partnership with others like Community Sports Hubs, Active Schools and clubs in your area who may not have a Sports Governing Body for example.

### Four practical reasons for engaging local politicians:

1. **Local resources** – politicians control and influence money, people, and facilities.
2. **Fix problems** – politicians can unlock stubborn issues and put pressure on the right people to find a solution when a club or organisation has an intractable problem.
3. **Identify opportunities** – politicians are involved in lots of conversations. If they know what local clubs and organisations are doing they may spot opportunities and be able to bring you into those wider conversations.
4. **Provide profile** – politicians can be reasonably well known locally. This can be used to leverage local media coverage. They can also provide a club or organisation with profile with other community organisations.

### Reasons for engaging local politicians:

If you are going to engage politicians, make sure you spend this time effectively.

- **Why? Engage with a purpose**  
Be clear about what you are trying to achieve. This doesn't mean you have to wait until you need something to engage. Building a relationship with a politician is a legitimate purpose.

- **Who? Speak to the right local person**

There are 3 main groups of politicians in Scotland. Councillors, MSPs and MPs. Sports Councils and ClubSport networks should focus most attention on local Councillors.

Councillors (Local Authority) – Identify ward councillors, the lead councillor for sport (formal title may vary, may be portfolio holder / convenor for health, education, communities for example) and the Leader of Council. If you don't know, look at your local authority website to find out which councillor has lead responsibility for sport.

Local / constituency / regional politicians are always likely to be interested and try to help, but it is sometimes more helpful to you to understand who has closest remit. For example, the Minister of Sport is unlikely to intervene in issues that are the responsibility of the local authority (e.g. leisure centre pricing) as this is outside their remit.

- **What? Quality over quantity**

Design an engagement relevant to the What and the Why. Both you and politicians are busy, so take a 'less is more' approach and prioritise a small number of quality engagements over trying to engage with every local politician or multiple engagements with the same politician.

#### **Hints and tips for getting your messaging right:**

- **Be positive** – Don't aggressively attack politicians or the local authority. No one likes to feel under attack, and they are likely to get defensive. Try to remain positive and be measured in criticism.
- **Sell your Sports Council / ClubSport network and your members but also sell sport** – You should talk about what your organisation does that makes it unique, often the decisions politicians make are about overall support for sport, less so about intervening in decisions about individual clubs and organisations. Try to message the overall impact of sport, use examples from your membership, share case studies highlighting the positive impact you have had on sport in the local area.

Highlight how working together as the voice for sport in the local authority brings local clubs and organisations together under the Sports Council / ClubSport umbrella and how this can help to grow the size of the overall input and financial contribution available to sport meaning everyone gets more.

- **Impact beyond sport** – Politicians are unlikely to be very interested in the sporting achievements of individual clubs. They are more likely to be interested in how many people are engaging with sport across the area and how that benefits other priorities they are working on. For example, how does participation benefit health, education or skills of members or how is your Sports Council / ClubSport working to engage more young people or older people in sport. These connections will make sport more interesting and relevant to politicians.
- **Keep it simple** – Politicians are not experts in sport and are very busy and involved in lots of conversations across a huge range of topics. Keep your message simple. If you go into great detail you are likely to lose them.
- **Be clear and realistic in your ask** – If you can give a politician a really clear action to go away and deliver for you, they are much more likely to do so than if they have to spend lots of time trying to



work out for themselves what would help. They may not respond well to unrealistic asks. If they don't feel anything will ever be enough to satisfy you, they may decide it is better to avoid engagement instead.

### How to engage:

#### In the short-term:

- **Use social media and websites:** Tag local politicians in the posts and articles you upload. Share relevant information from them and others e.g. Leisure Trusts and Local Authorities, clubs, Sports Governing Bodies. Be as active online as you can. *If you need support to set up social media let us know, we can help.*
- **Invite local politicians to your meetings:** At the moment these will be online or conference calls. Encourage them to attend, they can hear first-hand the impact on sport and be involved in discussions, they can provide advice and report back to Local Authorities.
- **E-mail a report:** It doesn't have to be a complicated or extensive report but a clear summary highlighting the immediate impact the coronavirus has had on you and your members and e-mail it to the relevant local politicians.

#### Post coronavirus and once it is safe to do so:

- **Getting them to your meetings:** Politicians are busy, so the more notice you provide and the more flexible you are on dates and times, the more likely they are to be able to accept your invitation. Always encourage them to attend.

Make sure to mention things that will benefit them. For example if you are going to provide a photo opportunity, promote their visit with local media or social media, or give them the chance to speak to a large audience, these ensure they get some profile and acknowledgement from the visit.

- **During the visit:** Ensure the visit is well structured. Elements to include are: see activity, meet participants and volunteers, and a photo opportunity. It is important to also take time to explain what is happening beyond what can be seen. For example all the clubs organisations you work with, the resources required to deliver your activity, and the wider impacts of your activity.
- **Follow-up:** Remember to thank the politician for their time, promote their visit, and if they have done something for the club this should be publicly acknowledged.
- **Keeping it going:** Having established a relationship it is important to keep it going. At this point invitations to your main events (festivals, award nights, etc.) are appropriate as the politicians can either accept or decline depending on their interest and availability. Send them occasional, concise updates on activity (avoid sending them long newsletters that they are unlikely to read). Tag them in social media posts. Importantly, when you need something make sure you make your ask, that is why you have spent time building the relationship.