

Dear Committee,

Inquiry into Physical Activity of children and young people

1. Ramblers Cymru is the representative body for walkers in Wales. We are part of the Ramblers, Britain's walking charity. We are the only charity dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, leading walks, opening up new places to explore and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts your health and your happiness.
2. *Our contribution focuses on the lessons learnt from the Let's Walk Cymru scheme; the effectiveness of Welsh Governments' approach to such schemes; and on Ramblers Cymru's own insights into the potential of walking to improve physical activity amongst children and young people.*

Let's Walk Cymru – background

3. From September 2012 to its forthcoming conclusion in September 2017, we have delivered the Let's Walk Cymru Health walking scheme on behalf of Welsh Government. This highly successful scheme supported part-time scheme co-ordinators in 18 local authority areas across Wales. These co-ordinators trained and supported local people to set up walking groups and to lead programmes of short walks to help people make the first steps from inactivity to active and healthier. It also runs the Wales Pedometer challenge which encourages individuals and workplaces to challenge themselves and walk more.
4. The 140 Let's Walk Cymru health walk groups led 17,000 walkers since 2014, with an average of 130 walks taking place each week. Over 3000 people currently use the Wales Pedometer Challenge website to log their physical activity.
5. This scheme has been very popular, over-subscribed and of great preventative benefit for people's health. Using the World Health Organisation/ Europe Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT) tool Let's Walk Cymru benefits the population by preventing 4 deaths per year, and the economic value of the total benefits accumulated is £686,000. If the cost of replacing the volunteers for paid staff is also factored in (£1,547,864) Let's Walk Cymru saves over £2.2million a year with a cost of only £285,000.

Let's Walk Cymru – supporting Children and Young People

6. Let's Walk Cymru was developed with a 'cradle-to-grave' approach, with support available to people at all stages of life. Although it was able to work successfully with some specific groups, this was sporadic. The scheme's resources were simply spread too thinly and expansion into work with more children and young people was not possible. Examples of project with children and young people include:

- Our Scramblers initiative was part-funded by Let's Walk Cymru and is aimed at primary school children. It has piloted five family walking hubs, in partnership with the National Trust, the Canal and River Trust and Glyncoirwg Ponds. We have also produced very popular walking educational activity booklet for children to encourage which encourages them to have fun and explore when walking.
- A Carmarthenshire pilot with school children with Special Educational Needs, run by a local 5x60 co-ordinator, which encourage the children to develop their walking, and which led to improvements in their schooling.
- The 'inspire to achieve' pilot in Blaenau Gwent – a walking programme aimed at excluded young people
- The up-skilling of unemployed people through walk leader training in Torfaen, in conjunction with the job centre

Let's Walk Cymru – end of funding

7. Unfortunately Welsh Government has not committed to the long-term development of the scheme, and as of 30th September 2017 it will cease to run.
8. Ramblers Cymru are disappointed by this situation as we are firmly of the view that these types of community-based volunteer-led schemes have huge potential to improve the health of the whole population.
9. Ramblers Cymru submitted 2 detailed proposals to Welsh Government outlining options for the development of Let's Walk Cymru into a more encompassing, financially sustainable scheme. Neither of these proposals has been adopted and following a 6-month extension, the funding will end on 30th September 2017 (full briefing provided at Annex 1)
10. Welsh Government's lack of commitment to the long-term development of an established model which has been proven to deliver increased physical activity is of concern.

Ramblers Cymru's work with young people

11. Work undertaken by Ramblers Cymru over recent years has convinced us of the need to engage more children and young people in the outdoors, and walking in particular. We are an Approved Provider for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and are committed to identifying opportunities to engage young people
12. In 2013 we explored the potential of a skills training scheme with young people in Merthyr Tydfil. Bespoke tailored sessions covered the essentials of walking, including why it is so beneficial, how to plan and lead a walk, map reading, responsibilities and safety in the outdoors.
13. We have engaged pupils in physical activity as part of their Welsh Baccalaureate, in the form of path maintenance work. 120 pupils from Swansea took part in path maintenance work in the Gower in 2013. For some of the young people, it was their first visit to the Gower despite living no more than half an hour's drive away. The

project gave young people the opportunity to engage with the environment, while working towards a qualification. It had the added benefits of providing skills and leaving an improved physical environment for others to enjoy.

14. In collaboration with Youth Cymru, the *Getting Out There with Scramblers Project* aimed to create partnerships between young people and local Ramblers groups leading to meaningful volunteer opportunities for both groups. We worked with 8 young people from Alternative Curriculum setting in a local school, Gwynedd Youth Offending Service (ages 13-18) and 14 local Ramblers footpath volunteers (the majority aged 65+). The 2-day practical course brought together members of the community who may not ordinarily engage with each other on a joint environmental and physical activity which allowed shared learning and exchange of knowledge.
15. We have also worked with Turning Point, to give young adults recovering from substance misuse the chance to experience the exhilaration of physical outdoor activity and the sense of achievement completing a challenging walk can bring. Some of the participants became walk leaders, and undertook the Welsh 3 peaks challenge for charity – giving back to the local community.
16. Learning from our research and experience confirm the following:
 - Structured walking activities with a reward or challenge appeal to children and young people; future activities should be designed with this in mind.
 - What activities children and young people currently undertake around walking is controlled mainly by what they do in school and the engagement and experiences of their support network i.e. families, friends and teachers
 - Organisations need to provide challenging activities rather than focusing on the health benefits of walking and increase focus on the social aspects of walking.
 - Long term engagement of teenagers can be achieved by offering the opportunity to learn and gain a new skill or qualification that could help them in their future career.
17. In our 2015 Manifesto *Wales for Walking: the routes for success* we called for the national curriculum to ensure young people understand their rights to walk our path network and access land, and their responsibilities under the Countryside Code. They should be given the life skills and confidence to explore and understand the outdoors. We believe this is vital if they are to use their environment for physical activity.

Physical Activity – gaps in infrastructure

18. Ramblers Cymru have been discussing potential opportunities for future walking schemes with public and third sector bodies across Wales, including the potential of social prescribing. These discussions have highlighted for us gaps in the infrastructure, including the lack of a network which brings together providers and the opportunities on offer for the general public; and the lack of mentors to help people make that initial step towards becoming more physically active. For example, an individual volunteer who physically accompanies someone on their first few short

walks, or who helps someone progress to more strenuous exercise.

19. This gap could be filled by a scheme which builds on the 'Come Outside!' initiative, delivered by NRW, funded by Welsh Government and which ended in 2016. This scheme targeted people with a sedentary lifestyle, living in deprived areas. The role of the 'Come Outside!' Co-ordinators was that they "inspired and motivated the support workers (working on behalf of the inactive individuals) to join up with local outdoor providers and gave them the skills and confidence to use outdoor activities in local greenspaces".
20. We would like to see Welsh Government, Health boards, and Local authorities across Wales support the long-term evolution of a walking scheme which puts people on the path to increased physical activity. Support for walking, which is the most accessible of all types of exercise, should not only be at the heart of public bodies' Wellbeing plans, but also at the heart of communities across Wales.

Ramblers Cymru's 10-year Vision

21. The Ramblers Cymru Vision 2016-2026, has three pillars:

- To help everyone find their feet
- To put walking at the heart of communities
- A Wales designed for walking

It is a vision which has increasing physical activity levels at its core, and it is our mission to play our part in creating a Wales where everyone enjoys the benefits of accessing the outdoors on foot.

Annex 1

The conclusion of the Lets Walk Cymru scheme

- 1) Since stepping in at short notice in 2012 to take on and revitalise Let's Walk Cymru, Ramblers Cymru have, in partnership with local authorities, successfully delivered a strong and vibrant health walking scheme across Wales.
- 2) From the time of securing a 3 year grant in 2014, we have continued to innovate and deliver volunteer led health walks to over 17,000 walkers in 140 groups across Wales. The scheme has long been operating at capacity, with huge untapped potential and unmet demand.
- 3) For this reason, in July 2016, Ramblers Cymru was asked to submit an ambitious proposal to Welsh Government. This proposal outlined options for an improved, more wide-reaching scheme. By addressing issues of capacity and paving the way for financial sustainability, reliance on Welsh Government contributions would be reduced over a 4 year period.
- 4) Although sought, no feedback was received on the proposal, but a request for further information was received in November 2016. This information was provided in December 2016. A second alternative proposal was invited in December 2016 and submitted in January 2017. This submission in particular was guided by Welsh Government officials' expressed requirements, and framed in the context of the forthcoming Wellbeing Bond as representing a new way of funding due in autumn 2017. A decision was expected by mid-February 2017.
- 5) With the end of funding period approaching, Ramblers Cymru was acutely aware that the uncertainty was leading to redundancies and redeployments amongst scheme co-ordinators, weakening the infrastructure of Lets Walk Cymru.
- 6) On 30th March 2017, two days before the grant expired, an offer of 6-months extension funding was received from Welsh Government. This money was to continue the business-as-usual operation of the scheme, alongside which Ramblers Cymru was asked to further explore the potential long-term funding options. As no additional money was made available for the development work, we advised Welsh Government that without additional resources, it would only be possible to begin exploratory work on future funding options. This was agreed and understood by Welsh Government. The scope of this work was further curtailed as the deliverables from the 6 month extension were not finalised until early July, over halfway through the funding extension.
- 7) Ramblers Cymru accepted this limited extension in the expectation that the Wellbeing Bond was imminent and it was a 'bridge' to allow for continuity of what was a well-established and proven intervention. Exploration of the potential funding mix which could provide long-term stability has begun, but 6 months is only time enough to begin this work. Securing alternative funding, while concurrently managing and overseeing the existing scheme, was not realistic without dedicated resources.

- 8) No further proposal or information has been requested by Welsh Government, nor has any feedback been received on the options we laid out for Let's Walk Cymru's long-term future.
- 9) Ramblers Cymru are disappointed that the scheme will no longer operate and that Welsh Government has not committed to the scheme's long-term development. However, as a charity committed to offering walking opportunities, we will continue to help people of all ages and abilities find their feet and enjoy the excellent benefits walking brings. This is very much part of our 10 year vision for a Walking Wales.
- 10) We believe that schemes like Lets Walk Cymru still have an important part to play in empowering people to take steps towards a happier and healthier life. We will now work with our members, local authorities, third and public sector partners across Wales to explore future opportunities to help people throughout Wales walk more and gain the health benefits it brings.