

The Report of the Sports Policy Review Team

Comments

by the

Hong Kong, China Rowing Association

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1. *The Report - Our View*

- 1.1 The stated objective of the Report is "to identify the key issues that we must address in framing a strategic sports policy for the Hong Kong SAR" (Introduction, para 2).
- 1.2 **To the extent of identifying the key issues, the Report has been successful. However in going on to offer solutions, it has confined these solutions to a narrow range restricted by current structures and policies, rather than asking whether the existing structures and policies are in fact part of the problem. This is a significant failing of the Report and one which might undermine the recommendations it contains.**
- 1.3 To have identified the problems is the first step. But in our view it is unrealistic to expect an internal review to find good and innovative long-term solutions, as the existing organisation and structure will always be a constraint on the outcome. This is apparent throughout the Report. This does not in any way question the intentions or integrity of HAB, but we should seek the best road to arrive at the best solutions.
- 1.4 As an intended basis for the formulation of a strategic blueprint for the development of sport in Hong Kong, the Report's time horizon of "five to ten years" is demonstrably too short. Even the Beijing Olympics is 6 years away. It is possibly this short-term view which limits the scope of the Report as much as its internal nature. But if we continue to avoid serious examination of the existing roles of Government and schools in promotion and development of sport in the broadest perspective, then in 20 years time we will have made no progress. The need is here. The opportunity is here. But it has not been grasped by the solutions tabled in the Report.
- 1.5 We agree with para 11.3 of the Report where it comments that an integrated approach is required. But in the same paragraph, the stated assumption of the role for enhanced LCSD programmes again indicates the limitations on the scope of the Report.
- 1.6 **If we are discussing the real and long term future of sport in Hong Kong, it would seem appropriate to commission a truly independent review conducted by a panel of experts drawn from countries of a similar size to Hong Kong with demonstrably successful sports systems. Excellent examples can be found in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, as the Report has noted. In the context of annual sports funding in Hong Kong, the cost of commissioning such a review will be nominal. The benefits have the potential to change the lives of Hong Kong's citizens.**
- 1.7 The Report proposes abolishing the SDB and absorbing its responsibilities into the HAB and LCSD, and to set up a purely advisory Sports Commission, with no resources or facilities under its direct control. The Commission would advise HAB on sports policy which would be subject to HAB's final decision. The Report states at para. 8.7 that HAB "has comparatively little scope for in-depth consideration of sports policy". The same concern must apply to HAB's ability to consider and decide on recommendations made by the proposed

Commission. Sports policy must be dynamic and proactive. Government as an organisation cannot achieve this and will always be reactive. This will not take Hong Kong sport into the international arena. Government involvement in managing sport has not produced the desired results to date, and we therefore do not understand the logic behind these proposals. A Commission structure which is wholly dependant on Government decision-making will not succeed. (See also Chapter 2 of this response.)

- 1.8 The Report notes that the administration of public sports facilities and the sports programmes operated by the Government have failed to generate sufficient participation, yet rather than scaling back the Government's involvement in favour of any other solution it proposes stronger efforts in the same direction. The Report supports outsourcing the management of public sports venues, but at the same time assumes a strong continued role for LCSD in this area thus not providing any clear picture of the intention. Para 6.9 states that initial outsourcing projects "are successful", but does not give any details or define the standard or objectives by which such success is measured.
- 1.9 The Report notes that the educational system provides Hong Kong's school children with little opportunity to take part in sport, yet recommends that efforts be made to persuade the Education Department to increase school sport. This is likely to compound past failures as well as putting more pressure on teachers and students. Rather than considering the reasons for the lack of success of past policies it proposes to redouble these unsuccessful efforts. This is a superficial approach and one which is likely to result in lip service and wasted resources. New solutions are needed, but only after the real reasons for current failures have been analysed.

1.10 **In summary, the Report notes:-**

- **that Government administration of sports facilities has failed to generate significant participation and**
- **that the education system has failed to provide much in the way of organised sport.**

If something is not working it needs changing. Without change there will be no progress and to achieve significant progress will require significant change.

- 1.11 We applaud the effort at overseas research, but question the conclusions. In Denmark, the Report quotes:

"Danes love sport About 75% of all children and young people in Denmark engage in sport regularly in their spare time, and almost half of the adult population is engaged in sport and exercise. Most do sport as a member of a sports club."

- **The Scandinavian lesson seems not to have been understood or to have been ignored. Denmark's high participation level is because Danish sport is organised almost entirely by clubs.**

- Danish schools do not organise sport. Children participate in sport through membership of sports clubs, along with their parents and everyone else in the community. The same applies in other European countries.
- 1.12 The Report notes that the Government spends \$2.5 billion annually on sport. Of this, 90% is spent by the LCSD. Some of this expenditure has the potential to be better utilised. Significant savings are possible if the Government were to progressively transfer responsibility for organising activity to clubs, with some of the savings being directed into supporting the club system.
- 1.13 It is noted that the SDB's budget is comparatively small at \$195 million. Compared with the LCSD's budget for sport, there seems little to be gained by removing the SDB's administrative staff.
- 1.14 In overall terms the Report contains many helpful observations, in particular its identification of key issues needing to be addressed. However it is too superficial to form the basis of a long-term policy strategy, and more investigation and analysis is required if Hong Kong is truly to put in place a strategy for sport to enhance international competitiveness, lifestyles and community health over the next twenty to fifty years.
- 1.15 It is shown from overseas studies that sport is a demand-led activity. If people do not want to participate they will not do so. If sport is attractive and provides social as well as physical satisfaction, people will participate even if it costs money. Past Government policies have disregarded the needs of participants in a demand-led environment. In sport, Clubs provide the social interaction and satisfaction sought by many people. Sports clubs particularly provide this through their clean and healthy objectives. Government policies of providing more subsidies to encourage participation through cheaper access, whilst ignoring the factors which keep people in sport, have failed because the product is not attractive. You cannot buy participation in sport. More subsidies will not resolve the long-term failings of such a system as people will graduate to other activities, including unhealthy or anti-social activities if they are bored with sport, even if it costs them more. This is one of the key problems with the way in which sport is currently organised in Hong Kong with over 85% of Government funding spent directly by the Government on its own activities.

2. *The Sports Commission Proposal*

- 2.1 The Report recommends the establishment of a Sports Commission. Whether it is called a Sports Commission or a Sports Development Board is immaterial. Assuming that the future body is called a Commission, what matters is:-
- that the Commission contains members elected from various constituent parts of the sports community. The number of elected members should not be less than the number of appointed and ex-officio members.
 - that the Commission has power to decide on policies and to see that they are executed.
- 2.2 It would be a highly retrograde step if the Government were to replace the SDB with a Commission that was only an advisory body, with no power of its own. This would regress Hong Kong 13 years to the time of the Council for Recreation & Sport (CRS). The CRS had no real authority. Much time was wasted by its members in fruitless discussion, papers were written and debated, and at the end of the day the Government and the municipal councils did not act on them. Progress was stifled and CRS members were frustrated by their inability to effect change. Replacing the CRS with the SDB was a major step forward, but the execution of this was hindered by the Government's subsequent strategies towards the Board.
- 2.3 The advantage of the SDB is that it was an independent, executive body, with its own budget and the ability to make timely and appropriate decisions at arms length from the Government. This it largely succeeded in doing, particularly in its early years.
- 2.4 Other governments have looked at the question of whether it is better to have an independent, executive body responsible for sport, or to have this role performed by a department of government. In the United Kingdom the House of Commons Environment Committee, chaired by Sir Hugh Rossi, investigated and reported on the Sports Council in a report published on 12th February 1986. In considering whether or not the role of the Sports Council could be equally as well discharged by the Department of the Environment, the committee asked itself two questions:-

"Are the executive tasks involved better carried out by the Department or by a "quango" and, if a quango, what should its membership be? We are clear about the answer to the first question. Firstly, a quango can be governed by a council or board of persons conversant with and expert in the problems of sport. That cannot be replicated in the Department. Secondly, such a council or board, whilst not completely independent of Government because it is appointed by Government and its operations are financed by Government, can speak with considerable independence of Government on behalf of sport, in a way which is not possible for a division of the Department. Thirdly, a quango can employ, on a continuing basis, at the highest full time management levels, professional sports administrators, while the control of a division in the

Department tends to be in the hands of senior civil servants whose expertise lies elsewhere and who constantly come and go within the Department. Thus, in this case, the classic conditions exist for the work to be "hived off" by the department to a separate organisation".

- 2.5 Nothing has changed since 1986. The conclusions of the UK Environment Committee are just as valid today as they were then and are just as applicable to Hong Kong as they were to the United Kingdom.
- 2.6 **The proposal to revert to an advisory body will result in the Government enlarging its area of direct responsibility. Sport will suffer even more from being administered by civil servants *"whose expertise lies elsewhere and who constantly come and go within the Department"*.**
- 2.7 **Since Government administration of sport has proven to be ineffective, a further enlargement of its area of direct responsibility would seem to be inappropriate. A movement in that direction would be to ignore the lessons to be learned from other countries and to ignore the nature of the problems identified by the Report itself.**
- 2.8 **The need for a truly independent review to be carried out by overseas experts (not consultants) is reiterated.**

3. Sports Delivery - the Government Role

- 3.1 No government, anywhere, should attempt to organise sport. Sport belongs to the community and people should be encouraged and allowed to organise it themselves. Government's direct involvement in the organisation of sport is not needed and, for a number of reasons, is counter productive to sports development.
- 3.2 Firstly, it creates the impression that the organisation of sport is a government responsibility, whereas the most effective organisation of sport is always by the people for the people.
- 3.3 Secondly, the overwhelming problem with government organised sport is that it can never expand participation beyond a relatively low level. This is the situation in Hong Kong. The Government does not have the resources to do more. The Government annually dedicates \$2.5 billion to the organisation of sport. If sports activity doubled, tripled, or quadrupled (and this must be our real target) Government resources could not cope.
- 3.4 Clubs and volunteers organising it is the only way sport can expand beyond the present level of participation. A high level of participation is only possible with the help of an army of volunteers, but, in contrast to the limited Government resources, there are an unlimited number of volunteers available from within the community. Again, such volunteers will not be prepared to volunteer their valuable time every week to help Government, but they will do so for their clubs, in which they have a direct and personal interest.
- 3.5 In Denmark, a country with a population of only 5.3 million, there are 50,000 volunteers organising sport. Can the Hong Kong Government commit 50,000 civil servants to organising sport? Could we afford to pay them? Clearly not.
- 3.6 Although there are many dedicated, enthusiastic and experienced staff in the LCSD, Government employees cannot be expected to have the same degree of enthusiasm and intimate knowledge as sports people themselves have in their own sports. Past experience shows that Government, administering public sports facilities, does not welcome significant expansion. It creates problems and difficulties for the staff concerned.
- 3.7 It is clear that the Government's policies on sport have not been successful. They have:-
- given priority to casual (i.e. unorganised) use of facilities,
 - failed to generate widespread and long-term participation,
 - obstructed the development of club based sport,
 - kept overall standards of performance at a low level,
 - adversely affected Hong Kong's results internationally,

- deprived the community of the benefits of club membership, as a focus for community life and activity.
- 3.8 Government can best promote sport by working to facilitate, encourage and support the organisation of sport, stepping away from direct involvement in organising and promoting activities on its own account. This will lead to strengthening of NSAs and growth in the number of clubs. As the club network expands, so will the number of volunteers involved in organising sport and other related socially desirable activities.
- 3.9 Encouragement of clubs should be, as in Denmark, through allowing them free or subsidised use of facilities. As an expanding network of clubs takes over the role of organising sport any loss in facility revenue should be offset by the savings in Government expenditure and vastly increased participation.
- 3.10 As in Denmark, additional encouragement of clubs should be through subsidising junior membership, thus providing an incentive for clubs to develop links with schools and recruit school children. This is a more positive approach than that proposed in the Report, of increasing sports activities as part of the curriculum, a formula which is already shown to be unsuccessful.
- 3.11 It is rumoured that the HAB is planning to cut its subsidies to community sports clubs. This would be a very retrograde step. Instead, more funds need to be allocated to encouraging club development, with subsidies primarily directed towards expanding the number of junior members. As in Denmark, audited returns of membership can be used to substantiate each club's claim for subsidy. These will also provide accurate annual statistics on participation levels for each age group, which will help in future planning for facility development and other aspects.
- 3.12 **The Government should progressively withdraw from directly organising sport and concentrate on facilitating the development of an extensive network of clubs. During this process Hong Kong will experience:-**
- **expanding participation,**
 - **progressively higher standards of performance,**
 - **increasing numbers of volunteers organising sport,**
 - **a larger pool from which to identify potential international athletes,**
 - **improved health among the community, including a reduction in the suicide rate,**
 - **an increase in the number of socially responsible citizens and**
 - **increased civic pride as Hong Kong's international performances improve.**

4. ***Sports Delivery Systems - Schools***

In commenting on the Report, we would like to take the opportunity to place on record our views on the delivery of sport. The Report proposes school-based delivery for young children and is less definitive in its proposals for adult participation. This and the following chapter set out our comments.

- 4.1 School based sport is a relic of Britain's colonial empire. In 18th century Britain, major boarding schools, such as Eton, Harrow, Rugby etc. were educating the children of Britain's upper and middle classes for future careers in the army, navy and colonial service. They understood that sport could teach the principles of discipline, self reliance, endeavour, teamwork etc., characteristics that would be of value in their pupils' future careers. Subsequently, the concept of school sport was exported to countries which had close links with Britain.
- 4.2 Other countries developed their sports system later and followed a different path. In many European countries clubs, not schools, became the means of delivering sport to children as well as to the rest of the community.
- 4.3 Educationalists acknowledge the value of sport, but Hong Kong's educational system lacks the resources, the desire and the capacity to significantly raise the level of school based sport.
- 4.4 **Any attempt to implement universal school based sport is likely to fail, as historical results of such policies in Hong Kong have so far indicated. In any case, school sport is not the best means of delivering sport to children.**
- 4.5 **School based sport suffers the overwhelming disadvantage that there is a huge dropout rate when children leave school, resulting in a persistently low participation rate within the adult community.**
- 4.6 School sport is a one way street from which only a handful of students graduate to adult participation. It's only advantage, if you can call it that, is that it can be **imposed** on children. It lacks the community integration that club based sport possesses and many children are glad to escape it when they leave school. By contrast, children who have been members of a sports club for most of their lives, appreciate the value of their club membership and willingly continue it after they leave school. Why would they not, when their families and many of their friends are members of various sports clubs?
- 4.7 Children who are introduced to sport within clubs at a young age will usually continue to participate after they leave school. For many of them, club membership will become a lifetime habit.
- 4.8 **Clubs, not schools, are the best means of delivering sport to children.**

5. **Sports Delivery Systems - Clubs**

- 5.1 The Report points out that in many countries with a high level of participation in sport, it is the existence of an extensive network of sports clubs that is responsible.
- 5.2 In Denmark and Sweden most sport is done through clubs. In Denmark more than 35% of the population belong to sports clubs. In Sweden it is close to 50%.
- 5.3 In Denmark, 75% of young people belong to sports clubs.
- 5.4 Please refer to Appendix 2 for details of sport within a typical Danish town.
- 5.5 **Clubs, managed by their members in a voluntary capacity, have been shown to be the most effective means of delivering sport to the community.**
- 5.6 Clubs are also cost effective because much of the work is done by volunteers.
- 5.7 Sports clubs alleviate stress and promote health and self confidence. They channel the energies of young people into healthy lifestyles, rather than unhealthy ones such as watching TV, hanging out on the street where they are targets for triad recruitment and can become involved in petty crime, experimentation with drugs and other socially undesirable and self destructive activities.
- 5.8 Clubs provide a valuable social focus for all age groups within the community. Children, parents, teachers, workers, bosses - all can belong to sports clubs and participate together in sports activity and in the administrative aspects of running a club.
- 5.9 Club members learn that they need to contribute to running their club by serving in various voluntary capacities. In this way they learn to become socially responsible members of the community and become more willing to contribute their time and energy to serving in other volunteer based community service organisations. They also gain organisational experience, self confidence and self respect.
- 5.10 **In addition to organising sports activity, a well run club will also organise a range of other activities and social events for its members. This 'added value' helps attract and retain members. Sports clubs are an essential element in building a socially responsible and mature community.**
- 5.11 Please refer to Appendix 1 for details of sports clubs.

6. Sports Facilities

- 6.1 The Report notes the need for a more strategic approach to planning of sports facilities (para. 6.13) but is vague about the importance of this except to note that “to maintain a steady supply of facilities in accordance with public needs, the five-year programme for new leisure services projects needs close monitoring...”.
- 6.2 At para 6.8, the Report sets out the current requirements of LCSD in planning new sports and leisure facilities. It notes that 64 projects are scheduled for implementation within the five years 2002 to 2007. It refers to the usage pattern of existing facilities and consistency with prevailing policy objectives for sport as being some of the criteria justifying new facilities.
- 6.3 Apart from its concentration on the important aspect of major venues, we suggest that the Report has not given sufficient attention to the fundamental questions -
- Do we have enough facilities?
 - Are facilities appropriately designed?
 - Do we cater to a wide range of activities?
 - Are facilities being used effectively?
- 6.4 No facility development plan
The Government has no integrated plan for sports facility development. The Report notes in its para 6.4, that Chapter 4 of the Planning Standards & Guidelines sets minimum standards of provision for a few activities for domestic use only. Some sports appear to have been over-provided, while others lack adequate facilities.
- 6.5 Lack of international standard facilities
Hong Kong has no standards and guidelines for provision of international standard facilities. There is a great lack of these and many sports are unable to host international events. The Report acknowledges that Hong Kong lacks facilities for the world’s major spectator sports and those facilities which can be used to host international events are outdated, or substandard, or suffer problems such as poor location (e.g. the Hong Kong Stadium). Apart from the negative effect on domestic sport, this deprives the population of the opportunity to see the world’s sports stars in action. It also has an adverse effect on tourism. But whilst supporting development of major venues, the Report does not identify any need for this to be within an overall facility development plan.
- 6.6 Lack of provision for domestic use
It is specious to claim that Hong Kong’s facilities are adequate for domestic use. Demand depends on several things:-
- The system for getting people into sport and organising activity.

- The range of activities for which there are facilities.
- The suitability of facility design.
- Accessibility, both geographic and in terms of operating hours.

6.7 Ineffective organisation of activity

As noted elsewhere, Government efforts to get people into public sports facilities and organisation of activity are ineffective. Existing public facilities are underused. Under-usage occurs because the Government attempts to organise activity itself, instead of delegating it to clubs. As demonstrated elsewhere, club based organisation is the most effective system for promoting and organising sport. Government organised activity is not cost effective because it relies heavily on paid employees, in contrast to club organised activity which relies mainly on volunteers.

- 6.8 The range of activities for which there are facilities is too small. A larger variety of sports will attract more people. To encourage increased participation, the Government should build more sports facilities and the range of sports available should be expanded. For example, ice skating rinks can accommodate figure skating, ice hockey, speed skating and curling. All of these are indoor and year round and would be very popular. Permanent facilities are needed for many sports, such as gymnastics and track cycling. Multi-use facilities are inefficient due to the time wasted setting up and taking down equipment. Furthermore, a multi-use facility is unavailable for one sport while another is taking place. Multi-use facilities should be converted to specialised use, where they can become the focus for individual sports.
- 6.9 Facilities should provide for effective operation of clubs as social centres for the community. Present facilities do not meet this requirement.
- 6.10 Restrictions on opening hours increase the impression that facilities are well utilised, but the reality is the opposite.
- 6.11 There is a limit to the amount of travelling that people are prepared to undertake in order to reach a facility for a particular sport, more so if they want to train every day, so facilities for a wide variety of sports need to be widely distributed.
- 6.12 The Report (para. 3.14 & 6.8) notes that development of 64 new public sports facilities will begin at a district level over the next five years. There is an opportunity to create the right environment for club based sport to thrive if these facilities are well planned in the context of sports development, but in the absence of a comprehensive facility development plan these new facilities may, in the long term, be a wasted resource.
- 6.13 Is it possible that the community could take responsibility for organising activity in public facilities? Why not? There are many examples of long established clubs where the members organise their own activity to a high level of intensity and success.

6.14 **A comprehensive facility development plan is needed, aimed at providing a wide range of sports facilities for use by community sports clubs and for national team training. All facilities should be designed to allow clubs to function effectively as social centres for the community and to facilitate competitive sport all facilities should have adequate provision for spectators. The party having responsibility for drawing up of such a plan will depend on the outcome of the sports policy review. Under the current structure the SDB should have this role, in view of its statutory responsibilities.**

7. Sport & the Community

In the two closing chapters of this submission, we would like to expand on the comments of the Report in respect of the importance of organised sport and on the current state of sport in Hong Kong.

- 7.1 Regular physical recreational activity is essential to the physical and psychological health of the individual and of the community.
- 7.2 Sport is literally *RE-CREATION*, i.e. the restoration and maintenance of the mind and body in a healthy condition.
- 7.3 Most Hong Kong people get far too little physical recreational activity. This is a major cause of an increasing range of health problems within the community, from obese children to early heart attack victims.
- 7.4 Hong Kong's suicide rate is testament to the unhealthy state of our society. Obesity, diabetes and other diseases are increasing. Public and private health care costs are escalating.
- 7.5 Although they will usually agree that they need more exercise, most people find that exercising for the sake of their health is boring and un motivating and few people are prepared to do it.
- 7.6 By contrast, people enjoy sport because it is fun and they can do it with, and in competition with, other like minded people. As a by product of participating in sport, they get a dose of physical activity that brings with it considerable health benefits.
- 7.7 **Sport is by far the most effective means of delivering physical exercise - because sport is predominantly an enjoyable social activity.**
- 7.8 However, sport does not just happen. There has to be an organisational system for delivering sport that draws people in and keeps them motivated and involved and that provides other benefits in addition to the recreational activity itself.
- 7.9 As stated earlier in Chapter 1, para 1.15, sport must be recognised as a "demand-led" activity if large numbers of people are to participate in it over the long term. People will participate if they enjoy sport. No amount of money spent on promotion and publicity will attract sustained long-term participation if people themselves do not positively want to take part. It is this factor that is the key to developing a culture of sports participation and it is this factor which governments the world over cannot provide on their own.

8. The State of Sport in Hong Kong

- 8.1 The Report recognises that notwithstanding Government promotional efforts, only a small percentage of the adult population take part in sport and sport among school children is also at a low level.
- 8.2 Hong Kong's achievements in international competition, although improving considerably over the past ten years, are poor in relation to the size of its population and its financial strength.
- 8.3 It is acknowledged that Hong Kong's historical and cultural background have contributed to the delayed development of sport as a priority in the community. However it is also clear from the demand for events such as the Standard Chartered Marathon and Trailwalker, together with many other examples, that Hong Kong people are ready and keen to move forward in sport, given the right environment and encouragement.
- 8.4 To illustrate what is possible with sound long term development, consider the medals won at the last two summer Olympic Games by the three small Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, in comparison with Hong Kong:-

Country	Pop.	1996 Summer Olympics			2000 Summer Olympics		
		Gold	Silver	Bronze	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Sweden	8.9 m	2	4	2	4	5	3
Denmark	5.3 m	4	1	1	1	3	1
Norway	4.4 m	2	2	3	4	3	2
Hong Kong	6.8 m	1	-	-	-	-	-

- 8.5 The average population of the Scandinavian countries is 6.2 million. Hong Kong has 6.8 million.
- 8.6 The Scandinavian countries' average medal haul at the 1996 and 2000 summer Olympics is 7.8 medals each. Hong Kong's figure is half a medal (with no medals won before or after 1996). The Scandinavian results are normal. They regularly garner a clutch of medals in the summer Olympic Games and collect more in the winter Olympics. In the 2002 winter Olympics Norway won 11 gold, 7 silver and 6 bronze medals.
- 8.7 The international success of the Scandinavian countries is not due to any overwhelming superiority in economic strength. Comparative Gross Domestic Product figures per head of population for 2000 are:-
- Sweden US\$25,521
 - Denmark US\$30,630
 - Norway US\$36,765
 - Hong Kong US\$23,918

Lack of money does not account for Hong Kong's poor results. The possibilities are there. It needs investment and sound and proven long-term policies,

coupled with effective organisation of sport. The people of Hong Kong owe this to themselves.

- 8.8 It is no longer acceptable to say that “Hong Kong is different”. Yes, historically, Hong Kong is behind many countries in developing a sports culture, but that is mainly due to the Government’s policies towards the organisation of sport. Any such comparison, viewed in the context of the strong and growing domestic demand for participation in organised sport, shows that Hong Kong is not so different in this respect, but it does need the opportunity to grow. We feel that the proposals set out in the Report will not provide this opportunity.

What is a sports club?

For a community of 6.8 million people, Hong Kong has very few sports clubs. Consequently, the vast majority of the community have no direct experience of what a sports club is, how it functions, or what its benefits might be. This lack of understanding exists throughout the community. Many people, if asked to identify a sports club, will point to clubs like the Hong Kong Golf Club, the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, the Hong Kong Football Club, or the Hong Kong Jockey Club. These are not the kind of sports clubs to which these comments refer.

What is a sports club?

- A sports club is a group of people joined together in an organised way to take part in a sport in which they share a common interest.

Facilities

- The club may own its own facilities, or may operate from rented premises, or from premises provided by the local government to promote community development and welfare.

Membership

- Membership is open to any member of the community who has an interest in the activity for which the club was formed. Growth of membership should be actively pursued. This can be done through a membership development committee working in conjunction with other committees to provide training and competition and a range of activities that attract and retain members.

Organisation of sports activity

- The essence of a sports club is that it provides a structured programme of activity organised by club members. Some members may not require this and be content to organise their own activity. Others, particularly younger or newer members, will need organised training, coaching and competition. These are usually provided voluntarily by club members who have an interest in developing the club and the sport. The bigger the club the more important it is to have properly organised activity and ensure that every member's needs are met.
- The club will be affiliated to the local governing body of the sport and compete in leagues and competitions and overseas competitions.
- If the club is a multi-sport club, it will affiliate to the relevant governing body for each sport. In such case the club's organisational arrangements will reflect the fact that it is engaged in more than one sport.

Entrance fee & subscription

- An entrance fee and a periodic subscription are charged to members to help meet operating expenses.

Officers & committees

- Officers and committees are elected at the annual general meeting. The organisational structure is set out in the constitution. All the functions required for the club to operate effectively should be allocated to responsible members, either by election or by appointment. As the club grows, manpower is expanded by forming committees to spread the work load and benefit from the wider experience available within the membership.

Constitution

- The club will have a written constitution, setting out the purpose of the club, its organisational structure and rules governing such things as membership, election of officers, committees, financial management, how to change the constitution and winding up procedures.

Registration

- In Hong Kong clubs must either be registered under the Societies Ordinance or the Companies Ordinance.
- A club registered under the Societies Ordinance has no separate legal identity apart from that of its members. It has no limited liability and its members are jointly and severally liable for the club's debts. Any assets of the club will be held in trust on behalf of the club by authorised members, for example the signatories to the club's bank account. Equipment acquired by the club will be collectively owned by all the members. The Societies Ordinance provides no effective supervision and if the committee fails to conduct the club in accordance with the constitution members will have to deal with the problem themselves.
- A club registered under the Companies Ordinance has a separate legal identity to that of its members. It can own property and other assets in its own right. The liability of members is normally limited by guarantee, meaning that their liability for the club's debts is limited to a nominal amount stipulated in the Articles of Association. The club must submit an annual return together with audited accounts and returns of its elected officers. An annual general meeting must be held in each year. The Registrar of Companies exercises supervision over compliance with the Ordinance. A club registered under the Companies Ordinance is, therefore, required to be administered to a higher standard than one registered under the Societies Ordinance.

The social value of a sports club

- A well managed sports club is much more than merely an organisation for organising sport. It is a social focus for its members, providing opportunities for friendship, voluntary service and personal development. It brings together people from different occupations and social backgrounds in pursuit of a common interest. It provides a structured environment for young people, that focuses their attention

and energies in a healthy and socially desirable direction. It relieves stress and helps to promote healthy living. It organises a range of activities for its members to supplement its primary role as a sports organiser. It is an invaluable ingredient in developing and maintaining a healthy society. It is an indicator of a mature society.

A town in Denmark

The following information is extracted from a report of a study visit to Denmark in September 1997 on behalf of the Scottish Sports Council. Currency amounts are expressed in Hong Kong dollars.

Ålborg

Denmark operates a sports system based on local clubs and does not have a formal system of school sport. Ålborg is a city of 160,000 inhabitants situated in Northern Denmark. The Ålborg Education and Leisure Department deals with formal and informal education, leisure and cultural activities and libraries.

Kristian Moller, Ålborg's Chief Leisure-Time and Cultural Officer, and his four senior managers explained the role of a local authority, with particular reference to sport. According to Moller the roots of the Danish approach lie in the constitution of 1849 which gave citizens the right 'without permission' to form associations for the pursuit of any lawful purpose. Any five people can form an association in the knowledge that they will automatically receive financial aid from national or local government.

The Danish law of general education is tied to the concept of the association. It states that activity within the framework of an association is important to a person's health, social life and democratic awareness. As long as an association falls within that broad notion of general education it is guaranteed financial support. The term 'association' is interchangeable with 'club' but it has a broader meaning which can incorporate youth groups, arts and drama groups and other societies.

Until 1964 the ways in which local authorities were permitted to assist clubs and associations were not specified in legislation. The Leisure Time Act (1964) compelled local authorities to ensure access for clubs and associations to public facilities; to offer grants for acquisition and improvements to premises; to assist with the maintenance and running costs of facilities; and to provide grants for the education and training of volunteers. The Folkeoplysning Act (1984) extended the powers of local authorities. This was part of a growing commitment by central government to the development of sport.

Between 1964 and 1984 local authorities throughout Denmark increased the stock of publicly-owned sports facilities and grounds. They also invested heavily in clubs and sports which owned their premises. At no time in that short period of expansion was it suggested that schools should take responsibility for sport beyond school hours. Clubs were strengthened, grants for maintenance amounted to 90 per cent of the costs, and the guiding rationale remained that cultural activities should be developed by community associations. Local government should provide non-directive support to clubs. Kristian Moller summarised his and his colleagues' views of the democratic tradition:

"We believe in the people. The people can do it and they want to do it."

There are 400 associations in Ålborg of which 190 are sports clubs. The general education budget amounts to about HK\$112 million out of a total education and culture budget of HK\$1,236 million. About 30 per center of the HK\$112 million is used for the running costs of sports centres, swimming pools and ice rinks for public use.

Ålborg Council owns and manages a variety of facilities which it has accrued mainly over the past 30 years. They include 179 football pitches which are allocated free of charge among the 33 clubs. The Council owns the city centre stadium at which Ålborg FC plays its matches and also a large training complex of pitches in the suburbs. A wealthy club, Ålborg FC pays a modest rent for the stadium and nothing for the training grounds. The explanation is that Ålborg FC combines the role of football development agency for 600 amateurs with its public role as a European-level professional club. The Council is comfortable with two models of football development:

- The **escalator**, carrying talented players in a seamless pattern through various levels up to and including European competition.
- The **elevator**, which deposits players at their preferred level of participation and performance.

Freya Football Club

A day spent at the Freya Football Club brought home what a community club means. Freya has ranged from a high point of 500 members to the latest official list of about 300 in 1995. The club premises and five grass pitches (one floodlit) are located in a working class area of Ålborg. It operates 26 teams of all ages and levels of ability up to but not including professional football. Annual subscriptions are based on age groupings as shown below:

6 - 8 years	\$660		
9 - 10	\$780	17 - 18	\$1,140
11 - 12	\$900	19+	\$1,680
13 - 14	\$960	Old Boys/Grand Old Boys	\$720
15 - 16	\$1,020	Social members	\$120

The club employs an administrator but all other aspects of the club are looked after by volunteers. The club chairman summed up the values which characterise sports clubs in Denmark:

- First, a **sense of belonging**, which he encapsulated as “the club as a family house”. It is quite normal to find grandfathers, fathers and sons in membership. This leads to an important dimension of club life - getting parents to commit to giving time and effort. The club is not a baby-sitting service.
- Second, a **sense of sharing and responsibility**, summed by up by the chairman as “I am responsible for my life but I am also responsible for his life”.
- The third dimension of club life is **democracy**. All members have equal rights to benefits irrespective of age, sex, economic status, race or religion. There are no special privileges for any individual or group.

The officers confirmed that there is a long tradition that schools do not organise sport. There is a clear boundary between schools and clubs. Club rooms are open all day, all year round and youngsters can go straight from school to the club. Leaders and coaches, many of

whom are parents, agree to give a certain amount of time each week. There was no sign of graffiti or vandalism at the Freya club.

The Council grant for maintenance and running costs has recently been reduced from 90 to 75 per cent, but the club is in a healthy financial position. The town Council owns and maintains the pitches and provides them free of charge.

Associations play an important role in the socialisation of young people. In Ålborg, detailed records of club membership are maintained. The Council gives a grant of \$540 for each member up to the age of 20. There is no check on how long these individuals remain in membership and it is recognised that multiple club memberships means that the Council is paying several times over for the same person.

The officers believe that clubs act responsibly and perform functions which they, the officers, could not. The officers also believe that large clubs, each with its own clubhouse, are the most effective sports organisations and that there are still too many small football and badminton clubs (Table). There is no compulsion for clubs to grow to a theoretically ideal size, but the most popular sports tend towards clubs in excess of 100 members.

Table : Club Membership of the Six Most Popular Sports in Ålborg

Sport	Members	Clubs	Av Mem/Club
Football	7,237	33	220
Gymnastics	6,751	27	250
Badminton	5,691	28	200
Handball	3,587	24	150
Tennis	3,069	17	180
Swimming	2,500	4	625
Top six total	28,835	133	215
Total for Ålborg clubs	44,814	233	190
Top six as % of total	64%	57%	

One in four of the 133 clubs have memberships in excess of 300. Only handball records less than 75 per cent of its clubs having more than 100 members. None of the other top 20 sports recorded an average of less than 100 members per club. Clubs in Ålborg generally own or lease clubrooms, and they provide a recognisable Sport for All programme.

The overwhelming impression from the visit to Ålborg was that there is a European club model that appears to be widespread in Denmark and meets the objectives of Sport for All. Sports clubs have been given the responsibility for sports development. Local authorities deliberately adopt a non-interventionist role in developing sport. They calculate that the 14,000 clubs in the country are better equipped to develop sport than the 275 local authorities.