Dear Margaret,

I am writing to update you on matters raised at the Equal Opportunities Committee on 18 December 2007, I apologise for the delay in responding.

Firstly, I said I would get back to the committee with further information as to whether or not officials and sportscotland representatives had held discussions on meeting its target for the participation of disabled people in sport more quickly. I can inform the committee that there have been no meetings between sportscotland and Scottish Government officials specifically about meeting the 60% target for participation amongst disabled people more speedily.

There have been meetings with sportscotland staff and local authorities about implementing Reaching Higher including increasing participation in sport. However, given that participation rates (for all adults in Scotland) show a decline from 49% in 2001 to 42% in 2006, the 2020 target of 60% of adult Scots participating in sport at least once a month is a very real challenge.

Secondly, on the issue of provision for Makaton; some projects sponsored by the Scottish Government, such as the Communication Forum Scotland project to develop a communication toolkit to facilitate civic participation for people with communication impairments, are inclusive of Makaton users. However, we are not at present taking forward any specific work around Makaton.

Thirdly, I undertook to look at the Scottish Government’s approach to the provision of alternative formats and identify whether a more proactive approach is needed. Current Scottish Government policy is that we provide alternative formats on request. We also produce alternative formats in advance when we know that there is a particular interest from disabled people. However, we have found that sometimes providing a translated, Braille or audio version of a document is not always the best solution and there may be other ways of getting the message across. We therefore consider each case on its own merits and provide the most appropriate and cost effective method available.
Taking a more proactive approach such as producing all our documents in a range of alternative formats in advance of them being requested would have to be carefully considered, balancing the sometimes substantial costs incurred in producing material in alternative formats, with the demand for these services.

However, we do ensure that all our publications carry details about the provision and availability of alternative formats.

Finally, I was asked to consider the different funding streams which provide funding for our work to support access panels and provide a detailed answer to the Committee as to whether it would be more efficient and effective for the funding to come from one central source. As the Committee will know, the Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) is the umbrella body for access panels in Scotland. At present, funding for SDEF comes from 2 sources within Government, the Equality Unit and Adult Care and Support Division. SDEF receive grant funding from Adult Care and Support for their role as the umbrella body for access panels in Scotland. The Equality Unit provides grant funding to SDEF for their work to develop engagement and consultation with disabled people. In the past, the Equality Unit also provided funding to SDEF to distribute to access panels. Therefore SDEF have a funding relationship with only 2 parts of the Scottish Government in connection with their work on access panels. The timing for completing of grant applications is different for each, so as not to put undue pressure on the organisation. To date this arrangement has worked well, and there have been no concerns raised by SDEF. The Scottish Government therefore does not have any plans to change the way in which this funding is distributed.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

STEWART MAXWELL