



House of Commons
Culture, Media and Sport
Committee

Accessibility of Sports Stadia

Fifth Report of Session 2016–17



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Sports Stadia**

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*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Elizabeth Flood (Clerk), Kevin Candy (Inquiry Manager), Cameron Wall, (Inquiry Manager), Hannah Wentworth (Senior Committee Assistant), Keely Bishop (Committee Assistant) and Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6188; the Committee's email address is cmscom@parliament.uk

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Introduction

1. There are 11.9 million disabled people in the UK, 19% of the population; 6.5 million have a mobility impairment, 4.5 million have problems with stamina/breathing/fatigue, 2.1 million a mental health problem, 1.9 million a memory impairment, 1.7 million a hearing impairment, 1.5 million a visual impairment, and 1.5 million learning difficulties.¹

2. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its successor the Equality Act 2010 require those providing services to the public, such as a sports stadium, to make a ‘reasonable adjustment’ so that people with disabilities are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to people without disabilities. Service providers are expected to anticipate the requirements of disabled customers and the adjustments that may have to be made for them. However, they are required to make only the adjustments that are reasonable in the circumstances, taking into account issues such as the practicability and cost of making the adjustment and the resources available to the organisation.² Where it is considered that service providers have not made a reasonable adjustment by providing sufficient facilities, a disabled person may take a civil action against the provider at the County Court (Sheriff’s Court in Scotland).³

3. Because the reasonable adjustment duty has existed since 1995, a sports ground built or substantially redeveloped since then would be “under the greatest obligation”⁴ to make an adjustment, as the owners and operators of the ground should have anticipated that a proportion of spectators, whether home or visiting fans, would be disabled. Older sports grounds are not exempt: disabled spectators are entitled to ask clubs to make reasonable adjustments.

4. In March 2014, the BBC published an article on its website about the scarcity of wheelchair user spaces at Premiership football grounds.⁵ In July 2014, the Minister for Sport and the Minister for Disabled People agreed to undertake a joint survey of facilities at sports grounds, with the aim of achieving

“a better understanding of the barriers that disabled people face when attending spectator sports events, ensuring that spectator sports clubs and venues have relevant information that sets out their responsibilities to make their grounds inclusive and accessible and to make sure that sports governing bodies raise the profile of access and inclusion in their sports venues.”⁶

5. Accordingly, the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) conducted a small survey of disabled people and a complementary one of spectator sports clubs. In all, 945 disabled people responded to the survey, as did 88

1 Family Resources Survey 2013/14 In addition, 3.4 million have a dexterity impairment, 0.8 million social or behavioural difficulties and 1.8 million ‘Other’. A number of people have more than one impairment, so the numbers do not add up to 11.9 million.

2 S21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

3 S25 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

4 DWP and DCMS *Inclusive and Accessible Stadia Report*. P6

5 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/26662957> At that time, only Swansea, Southampton and Cardiff provided the required number of wheelchair spaces. Eight of the 20 Premier League clubs provided less than half the number required.

6 *Inclusive and Accessible Stadia Report*, p7

of the 223 sports clubs that received the second survey. The ODI and DCMS agreed to limit themselves to sending surveys to football, rugby union and rugby league and county cricket clubs as these are the main spectator sports in Great Britain.

6. We discuss the survey's detailed findings below, but overall the results showed a shocking lack of provision for supporters with disabilities of all kinds, including in some cases a failure even to train staff in basic disability awareness.

7. On 14 September 2015, on the day of publication of the survey findings, a report on the BBC news website⁷ stated that all Premier League clubs had agreed to improve access for disabled supporters by August 2017. At that time, 15 clubs would have had to increase capacity for people with mobility difficulties to comply with the guidelines.

8. In May 2016, conscious that nearly half the time allotted for improvements to Premier League stadia had passed, we decided to hold an inquiry into the accessibility of sports stadia. We noted:

Despite years of campaigning, many sports fans with disabilities find facilities at sports stadia inadequate or inappropriate for them, even when the grounds have been modernised. These failures extend to Premier League clubs. Detailed best practice guidance exists at both national and European level, but some clubs seem content to do the minimum legally required, without considering whether access is really adequate.⁸

It is very clear that sports clubs, notably many of those with very considerable income and resources, have not given priority to sports fans with disabilities in recent years, despite the increase in income many of those clubs have received.

9. We took oral evidence from Joyce Cooke OBE, Chair, and Ruth Hopkins, General Manager, of Level Playing Field, an organisation representing (primarily football) fans with disabilities; from Bill Bush, Executive Director of the Premier League; Steve Gilbert, a member of Wrexham Disabled Supporters Association; Lord Holmes of Richmond MBE, Disability Commissioner, Equalities and Human Rights Commission; and from Justin Tomlinson MP, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pensions, and Nick Pontefract, the Head of Sports, DCMS. We also took advantage of the attendance of Mr Greg Clarke, Chairman of The FA, and Tracey Crouch MP, the Minister for Sport, on other occasions to ask them a few questions about accessibility. We received written evidence from 15 organisations and individuals, some of whom asked for their contributions to be treated confidentially because they feared repercussions from the clubs of which they were critical and from fellow supporters.⁹ We are very grateful to all who gave evidence to us.

7 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/34249011>

8 Press Notice from the Committee, 19 May 2016

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/news-parliament-2015/accessibility-of-sports-stadia-launch-16-17-/>

9 Oral and written evidence (with the exception of the confidential memoranda) are published on the Committee's website at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/sports-stadia-accessibility-16-17/publications>. Oral evidence is referred to in this Report by question number ('Q x').

1 The experience of those with disabilities

Inclusive and Accessible Stadia survey

10. The most popular spectator sport amongst the fans who responded to the Inclusive and Accessible Stadia survey was football, but rugby, cricket, tennis athletics and swimming were also mentioned often. Other sports highlighted included equestrian events, motor racing, ice hockey, basketball, American football, cycling, golf and darts.

11. Responses came from people with a wide range of disabilities: mobility (those in wheelchairs and those who had problems with walking), hearing, sight and mental and memory problems. They suggested that all types of disability were inadequately catered for by the sporting authorities.

12. The difficulties highlighted in the responses to the consultation were echoed by those who sent written evidence to us. The paragraphs below represent what disabled people may have to deal with if they wish to attend a sporting event.

Obtaining information about fixtures and facilities; booking tickets

13. Their experiences of difficulties start when they begin to think of attending an event. Some clubs have online booking systems that do not meet current best practice guidelines for accessibility for disabled people. Others have confusing websites which make it unclear whether wheelchair spaces are available and, if so, how one goes about booking them. Most club websites do not provide for booking a wheelchair space online: disabled fans have to call a premium phone line, send an e-mail or visit a ticket office in person.¹⁰ It is not always explained what provision has been made for those supporters who need someone to accompany them. Some websites do not bring together information about transport links, parking provision and disabled facilities at the stadium. The lack of information about facilities available caused particular difficulty for away fans. We were told that even the Premier League's recently launched fan app was not accessible to people with some disabilities and was having to be retro-fitted.¹¹

Transport, parking and accessibility to stadia from transport hubs and car parks

14. While transport frequently presents problems for people with disabilities, some venues provide little to help reduce the difficulty. There were complaints of a lack of parking provision, of people with mobility difficulties being expected to use car parks at a considerable distance from the stadium, of disabled parking facilities being sited in multi-storey parks with inadequate lift access. We heard that Wembley Stadium, which has been a shining example of design and operation with the needs of disabled spectators in mind, is expected to have its current open plan car park replaced with a new multi-storey car park. The lower levels are designed for parking coaches, while spaces for blue badge holders would be on level 2. This is likely to result in long queues for people with

10 (ASS0017) (Level Playing Field)

11 Q 196 (EHRC)

disabilities to use the car park lifts.¹² We were told that ‘away’ supporters travelling to the Newport ground (mainly the elderly and people with disabilities) were parked 15 minutes’ walk away, and that, because no police escort was provided at the end of the match, they got lost in pouring rain.¹³

15. Where people are travelling via public transport hubs at some distance from the stadia, while some clubs provide vehicles to take people with mobility difficulties to the stadium, others expect them to make their own way. Distance is not the only factor: steep slopes and uneven ground may also cause problems. There were numerous complaints about the failure of clubs to provide help for people in difficulty both in the vicinity of and inside the stadium.

Availability and siting of seats

16. Building Regulations state that, where reasonable, the permanent wheelchair provision for audience seating in venues where there are between 600 and 10,000 seats should be 1% of total seating capacity, rounded up.¹⁴

17. Most stadia have a limited number of wheelchair places (one Premier League football club, which was not named by the *Inclusive and Accessible Stadia* report, was said to have only three for away supporters). Where they make provision for carers to accompany wheelchair users, they usually provide space for only one carer per wheelchair user, which leads to family groups being split up. Moreover, wheelchair spaces are often grouped together, frequently in the home part of the ground, with home and away fans seated together.¹⁵ Even in newer stadia, such as Plymouth Argyle’s, the spaces may be pitchside.¹⁶ When at the front of stands, they are exposed to the weather and may have poor sightlines.¹⁷ Where they are further up in the stands, the view of the pitch may be lost when people in the rows in front stand up.¹⁸ Overall, Level Playing Field has received reports of extremely poor sightlines for disabled spectators at 50% of Premier League clubs.¹⁹

18. Inability to find appropriate seating is not limited to those with severe mobility impairment. Those with other mobility difficulties (for example, walking with sticks) often find it difficult, too: insufficient legroom is allowed, or they are not placed close enough to the end of the row, or there are few and distant lifts to the appropriate level. Walking surfaces are uneven. Access to toilet facilities and refreshments is often inadequate. Supporters also commented unfavourably on the cleanliness of toilets, the absence of basic washing facilities, and the failure to allow access to disabled toilets (for example, by

12 Qq 55–59 Wembley has 310 wheelchair accessible spaces with an equal number of adjacent seats available for personal assistants. It also has 100 enhanced amenity seats for ambulant disabled visitors, or visitors with assistance dogs. The seats are situated on all five levels of the Stadium, and are available in all areas of the seating bowl; including halfway line, corner and behind the goals. There are lifts to all five levels. The Stadium also has 147 disabled toilets accessible via RADAR keys and a further 193 ambulant toilets which are available on all levels. It provides a match commentary service for blind and partially sighted supporters.

13 ([ASS0009](#)) (Plymouth Argyle Disabled Supporters Association)

14 Approved Document M of the Building Regulations, Volume 2–Buildings other than dwellings: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441786/BR_PDF_AD_M2_2015.pdf

15 For example, at Aston Villa (see ([ASS0014](#)))

16 ([ASS0009](#))

17 As with Blackburn Rovers (See ([ASS0014](#)))

18 Chelsea and Charlton were cited: ([ASS0014](#))

19 ([ASS0017](#))

RADAR key) for those without a disability impairment. Carers of people with autism and other mental health problems commented on the lack of quiet places to act as refuges if people became agitated by the crowds and noise.²⁰

19. There is limited or no support for deaf spectators: no hearing loops, no subtitles on the screens round the field, difficulty in viewing the big screen at some stadia and some clubs show only replays, not live action, on the big screen. For those with visual impairments, 65% of the 92 top level football clubs provide no Audio Descriptive Commentary of the match, though some provide the less satisfactory substitute of access to a hospital or local radio broadcast.²¹ Joyce Cook told us that clubs even objected to the presence of assistance and guide dogs.²²

20. The main problem, though, was seen to be lack of awareness among staff: often club officials and stewards were inadequately trained in the needs of people with disabilities, especially those with ‘non-visible’ disabilities. This led to unpleasant experiences among disabled spectators, and even deterred some from attending sporting events at all.

21. Lord Holmes of the EHRC summed up: “I do not think we have an inclusive culture. We do not even have a culture of compliance from Premier League clubs and the Premier League.” What was required, he thought, was more openness about current failings, more leadership from the Premier League and a far more positive mindset about inclusivity.²³ He noted:

If you compare the Premier League rulebook, pages and pages on what needs to be done in terms of facilities, positions for broadcasters but on disability access, one line. If changes need to be made for broadcasters when HD cameras came in, they are made within weeks, not decades. That is absolutely right, but a similar zeal should be there to want—the club to want—the sport to be accessible, to be inclusive for all sections of the community.²⁴

22. Disabled spectators are not asking for a large number of expensive changes. They love their sports and wish only for their needs to be taken into account in the way sports stadia are designed and operated. As we go on to describe, a number of clubs are already providing disabled supporters with a good experience when they attend matches, and more could do so. It is high time that sports clubs, particularly those with available finance such as those in football’s Premier League, changed their mindset. It is more a question of will than resources.

20 See, for example, ([ASS0010](#)) (Shippey Campaign) and ([ASS0011](#)) (Helen Ellis)

21 ([ASS0017](#)) (Level Playing Field)

22 Qq16–17

23 Qq 196 and 200–201

24 Q 202

2 The response to date

23. Level Playing Field receives about 400 complaints from disabled fans every year.²⁵ It may therefore seem surprising that supporters have not yet exercised their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act to bring an action against a club. However, as we found from some of the written evidence submitted to us, disabled supporters were unwilling to take legal action partly out of loyalty to their clubs and partly fearing that other fans would target them or the clubs penalise them. One of our witnesses said: “fans will not complain due to being known as a trouble-maker or even having their tickets removed from them.”²⁶ ***Consideration should be given to devising a confidential reporting regime to enable complaints to be made without adverse consequences for those who complain.***

24. Level Playing Field’s evidence to us in May and July 2016 made it clear that all the problems found during the Government’s consultation had persisted. They told us that six of the 20 Premier League clubs and ten of the 72 Championship and League 1 and 2 clubs still made all wheelchair users sit together, whether home or away supporters. Moreover, they confirmed that eight Premier League clubs would not achieve the minimum standard for wheelchair provision by August 2017.²⁷ They said that one of the premierships clubs that failed to meet the minimum requirements stated that it did not need to do so as there was little demand for access by disabled people: Level Playing Field had tested the system for buying tickets and had found the website made no provision for access by disabled people, it was very difficult to find the appropriate place on the website to buy tickets for wheelchair users and then the information seemed to apply to season ticket holders only, and there was no guidance or assistance for other disabled people to buy tickets.²⁸

25. So far, the emphasis has been on football, as the largest spectator sport in the UK. Level Playing Field focused initially only on football, but from 2008 it began to advise other sports, in particular cricket, premierships rugby union and rugby league. We discussed with the Minister for Disabled People the example of Twickenham, with 336 spaces for wheelchair users, only 64 of which are raised above pitch height and all of which are uncovered, in a stadium built for 86,000 people.²⁹ Joyce Cook told us that the situation was still dire, with only 5% of first class county cricket grounds and only one of the premierships rugby clubs meeting the minimum requirement for wheelchair spaces. However, she described the attitude of the clubs and governing bodies of these sports as “extraordinarily supportive”, given that the issue of provision of facilities for disabled people had not been on their radar.³⁰ Lord Holmes of the EHRC concurred, describing the attitude of the top rugby and cricket clubs as “very positive, very engaging, exactly the right approach that one would want, taking it wider than just the physical access point and a very good result in these two sports.”³¹

25 Q 16

26 (ASS0009) (Plymouth Argyle Disabled Supporters Association) See also Q43 (Level Playing Field)

27 Qq 5 and 9 and (ASS0017)

28 Q1

29 Qq 106–108

30 Qq 1 and 8–10

31 Q 202

Responses by the clubs

26. The sports clubs consulted by Government appear to have been largely unaware of the inadequacy of the overall response to the needs of disabled spectators. Most provided wheelchair user spaces and easy access seating, but fewer did so for both home and away fans, and not all accessible seating had a good view of the pitch. Many said they provided assistance in entering and leaving and moving round the venue. They also said they had some adapted facilities. Audio descriptive commentary was rare (and was dependent on local radio). Few clubs provided hearing loops. Individual clubs listed a range of other facilities (such as match buddies, accessible match day programmes, rain ponchos for those in uncovered wheelchair places) but none was widely available. Some clubs gave disability awareness training for their staff. Some had links with local disabled supporters groups, with the link ranging from occasional meetings to close consultation. Bill Bush of the Premier League emphasised that all clubs in the league had to employ a disability liaison officer, who oversaw training and ‘customer care’ issues and a disability access officer, who dealt with the built environment.³²

27. As far as improvements were concerned, clubs cited the design of the venue, its age and its location as being limiting factors (for example, the location of the venue was often a problem in respect of providing enough accessible parking). They were less likely to consider finance a constraining factor on making improvements.³³ Some clubs suggested they did not know enough about disabled people’s needs.

28. Level Playing Field revealed that Liverpool, which was in the process of rebuilding part of its stadium, would still have only 75% of the minimum wheelchair places available if the project was completed—and it was not guaranteed that the second phase of reconstruction (which included a number of spaces for wheelchairs and seats for the other ambulant disabled) would be built unless the club made sufficient money from hospitality facilities in the first phase.³⁴

29. West Ham’s changes to the Olympic Stadium have resulted in some former wheelchair spaces being allocated a dual use: for wheelchair users or for hospitality facilities. Bill Bush of the Premier League assured us that the prime use was for disabled fans.³⁵ ***We expect the needs of disabled fans to receive priority over the desire to charge a premium for extra hospitality accommodation.***

30. In relation to the cost to football clubs of the changes required, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Disabled People noted that a figure of £100 million had been mentioned; he described this as “random” and “absolute nonsense”.³⁶ He suggested that estimating such a large figure enabled clubs to postpone thinking about the issue, including improvements that might be made cheaply and immediately: “This comes back to the football club saying: ‘We fear it is £100 million, so that is a problem we will worry about another day,’ when actually, having a lot of conversations and getting that training

32 Qq 185–187

33 See, for example, Q 139

34 Qq17–22

35 Q 175

36 Q 67

done will solve most of those problems.”³⁷ He cited the Football League’s decision to take responsibility for improving online accessibility and information in the disability access pages of all 72 Football League clubs.³⁸

31. Greg Clarke, Chairman of The FA, also expressed frustration at the slow pace of change in the Premier League. He said:

we are working very hard with the experts, Level Playing Field and our inclusion advisory board, we are working with the Leagues. They all have the standards. The trouble is a lot of clubs are not meeting the standards. There are no sanctions. If you say, “We have an old ground, there is nothing we can do. We are going to have to displace 50 season ticketholders who have been here for 100 years to build a new disabled facility. We can’t do that, that wouldn’t be right”. Maybe it is right to do that.

What we need from each club is a plan on how to solve quickly their own problems. It is exactly the same problem as you get when you put in new floodlights. You say, “Oh, you need this many lumens, not that many lumens and you need to move to LEDs rather halogens”. They say, “Oh, we are moving ground in two years”. It is so easy to give them an extension until they have the new ground.³⁹

He insisted that, for the Premier League, the problem was not money.⁴⁰

32. The Minister for Disabled People told us that if the Premier League clubs did not meet the deadline of August 2017 for improvements to be made (not just planned, as some have suggested), then the Premier League itself would hold those clubs to account. We questioned him about what this would mean in practice, worried that it would be no more than a mild rebuke. He told us that the clubs would be in breach of the League’s rules.⁴¹ Bill Bush explained that, depending on the severity of the case, the Board of the Premier League could impose a wide range of sanctions, including fines of up to £25,000. More serious breaches might result in the matter being referred to a specially appointed independent panel which would be able to impose heavier fines or, potentially, deduct points from clubs.⁴²

33. When asked whether legislation was a possibility, the Minister for Disabled People suggested that legislation would be a rather clumsy and inadequate response, making improvements in a tick box fashion rather than bringing about a real change of culture in which every aspect of a disabled person’s experience of attending the venue would be considered. He also pointed to the Twickenham Stadium example as showing how standards evolved over time: legislation would not necessarily enable changing expectations to be met.⁴³

37 Q 71

38 Q 71

39 Oral evidence to the Committee, The governance of football, 17 October 2016, Q 178: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/culture-media-and-sport-committee/the-governance-of-football/oral/41531.html>

40 Q 181

41 Qq 68–69, 79–80, 93–95, 112–114

42 Qq 168–172

43 Qq 68 and 85

34. We asked the Ministers about progress in relation to aspects of access other than physical facilities. They commented that the Sport Strategy launched at the end of 2015 was very useful in providing a new focus on increasing the number of spectators (not only those playing) in sport and, in the course of that, concentrating on traditionally under-represented groups such as disabled people. This meant that not only was there greater effort on spreading best practice through training and the provision of targeted and easily digestible information through all levels of sport but also that the success of this part of the strategy would be assessed through reported participation levels. The Minister for Disabled People also described the work being done with other bodies, such as the Security Industry Association (which licenses security personnel at stadia and elsewhere) in disability awareness, especially hidden impairments. He mentioned the role of young supporters groups (who played a key role in the developments at Wrexham Football Club and whose example had inspired his own local team, Swindon Town, to emulate them). He praised the vital work done by Level Playing Field, noting that it had been given three years' funding by the Premier League, but saying that he would like to see it placed on a more secure financial footing.⁴⁴ He suggested one improvement easy to implement, which was for every sports club to appoint one named contact to provide advice and help to people with disabilities about the facilities available and what else might be done to help them with their visit.⁴⁵

35. There is plenty of guidance available as to what adjustments might be considered reasonable for sports grounds (listed, for example, in Annex A of the Inclusive and Accessible Stadia Report) and many of the obvious ways to ameliorate the problems described above do not require considerable capital or disruption to the stadia and those visiting. Disability awareness training, professional access audits and design appraisals are not expensive and are available from a number of organisations. The start-up cost of a full Audio Descriptive Commentary Service is only £4,000 per club.⁴⁶ While the provision of extra wheelchair spaces, adequate lifts and more disabled toilets may require substantial building work, many clubs have made, are making or are planning major building works in which these might be included.

36. Other clubs are exemplars of best practice.⁴⁷ Level Playing Field cited Derby County in league football and Wrexham in non-league football.⁴⁸ Lord Holmes named Tranmere Rovers.⁴⁹ Greg Clarke, Chairman of The FA, talked about Egham Town.⁵⁰ It is striking that none of the examples cited for overall excellence is from the Premier League. Derby County's stadium is not old, but the plans for it were approved before the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The club has simply been committed to making reasonable adjustments from time to time to meet the needs of disabled people.⁵¹ Wrexham already had 50 wheelchair spaces pitch-side but these were open to the weather. They are currently in the process of building three viewing platforms which they hope will all be in place by

44 Qq 71–78

45 Q 77

46 ([ASS0017](#)) (Level Playing Field)

47 In addition to those listed in the paragraph, Watford, Swansea, Bournemouth, Sunderland, Yeovil and Newport were given very positive reviews for different aspects of their provision for disabled spectators—the last three in particular for their work with people with sensory and learning disabilities: ([ASS0006](#)), ([ASS0014](#))

48 Qq 12–13 and 133–138

49 Q 195

50 Oral evidence to the Committee, The governance of football, 17 October 2016, Q 181:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/culture-media-and-sport-committee/the-governance-of-football/oral/41531.html>

51 Q 16 and ([ASS0017](#))

the summer of 2017. The money for them was raised jointly by the club (which is 100% owned by the Supporters Trust) and the club's Disabled Supporters Association, with significant help from a grant from the Football Foundation.⁵² Wrexham's determination to make the ground accessible to everybody has extended beyond seating and toilet facilities to adaptations such as putting announcements about substitutions and extra time on the scoreboard, to help those with hearing difficulties.⁵³

37. Joyce Cook identified the main factors in determining whether a club took the needs of disabled people seriously as: "a champion within the club. ... an enlightened chief executive and .. a real commitment and a business plan year on year to keep improving."⁵⁴

38. The Minister for Disabled People said:

What we need is leadership in each of the relevant sports bodies to then filter through to the leadership in the individual sports clubs. Somebody can take ownership of this and make sure it then becomes embedded and a given, so it is not a one-off training exercise and then in six months' time when those staff have changed over or volunteers have changed over it is then forgotten. It becomes a given and that is the sports clubs, it is the security staff, and it is those who are then designing the next generation of stadium and facilities at the top end.⁵⁵

39. Since May, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has been reviewing progress in the Premier League towards meeting the August 2017 deadline for making all its clubs compliant with disability access requirements. It told us that Chelsea, Liverpool, Crystal Palace and Bournemouth are likely to miss the deadline; the recently promoted Watford, Burnley and Middlesbrough have been told that the deadline does not apply to them—they have another year to achieve the improvements. West Ham, which has reduced provision for disabled supporters since it took over the Olympic Stadium, is not included in this list. Lord Holmes, the Disability Commissioner at the EHRC, told us that the Equality Act provided for a number of sanctions that could be taken against individual clubs—and the Premier League itself, if non-compliance were systemic.⁵⁶ The Minister for Sport said that, if the Premier League and Football Leagues did not make the changes that are needed in this area, she would "stand squarely behind the Equality Commission in taking legal action on this."⁵⁷

40. We strongly applaud the work done by a number of football clubs in meeting both the letter and the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act. We accept that other sports have made less progress to date, but we note Level Playing Field's belief that rugby league, rugby union and county cricket clubs are taking the issue seriously. We encourage these sports to persist. However, we consider it completely unacceptable that a number of Premier League clubs—some of the richest sporting organisations in the UK—have failed to carry out even basic adaptations in over 20 years. Given the huge

52 Qq 133–136 and 138

53 Q 179

54 Q 15 See also Qq 176–177

55 Q 89

56 Qq 191–193

57 Oral evidence to the Committee, Work of the Sports Minister, 13 December 2016, Q 72:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/culture-media-and-sport-committee/work-of-the-sports-minister/oral/44487.html>

public investment in converting the Olympic Stadium into a Premier League football ground, we would expect all the partners involved to ensure that West Ham, at the very least, becomes an exemplar regarding disabled access.

41. We concur with Ministers that it is in the sports' own interests to pay more attention to the—often very moderate—needs of such a large proportion of the UK population. Most clubs do not sell all the tickets for games, and a reputation for being well adapted and welcoming to disabled supporters should enhance their reputations generally. Conversely, it could be considered a reputational risk—and one which sponsors would have to take seriously—if clubs continued to fail to engage with reasonable adjustments and thereby be in breach of the law.

42. The Premier League told us that it would consider imposing sanctions on clubs that fail to provide sufficient accessibility. However, it is not clear whether this relates only to the physical modifications that should be made to stadia, rather than the broader view of the quality of the overall experience for supporters with disabilities. Given 20 years of comparative inactivity by the football leagues, we are not convinced that the Premier League would impose suitable penalties on clubs, even for failing to meet building regulations.

43. *The Equality and Human Rights Commission has told us that it is minded to start legal proceedings against clubs that continue to flout the law. We support them in this action.*

Conclusions and recommendations

1. It is very clear that sports clubs, notably many of those with very considerable income and resources, have not given priority to sports fans with disabilities in recent years, despite the increase in income many of those clubs have received. (Paragraph 8)
2. Disabled spectators are not asking for a large number of expensive changes. They love their sports and wish only for their needs to be taken into account in the way sports stadia are designed and operated. As we go on to describe, a number of clubs are already providing disabled supporters with a good experience when they attend matches, and more could do so. It is high time that sports clubs, particularly those with available finance such as those in football's Premier League, changed their mindset. It is more a question of will than resources. (Paragraph 22)
3. *Consideration should be given to devising a confidential reporting regime to enable complaints to be made without adverse consequences for those who complain.* (Paragraph 23)
4. *We expect the needs of disabled fans to receive priority over the desire to charge a premium for extra hospitality accommodation.* (Paragraph 29)
5. There is plenty of guidance available as to what adjustments might be considered reasonable for sports grounds (listed, for example, in Annex A of the Inclusive and Accessible Stadia Report) and many of the obvious ways to ameliorate the problems described above do not require considerable capital or disruption to the stadia and those visiting. Disability awareness training, professional access audits and design appraisals are not expensive and are available from a number of organisations. The start-up cost of a full Audio Descriptive Commentary Service is only £4,000 per club. While the provision of extra wheelchair spaces, adequate lifts and more disabled toilets may require substantial building work, many clubs have made, are making or are planning major building works in which these might be included. (Paragraph 35)
6. We strongly applaud the work done by a number of football clubs in meeting both the letter and the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act. We accept that other sports have made less progress to date, but we note Level Playing Field's belief that rugby league, rugby union and county cricket clubs are taking the issue seriously. We encourage these sports to persist. However, we consider it completely unacceptable that a number of Premier League clubs—some of the richest sporting organisations in the UK—have failed to carry out even basic adaptations in over 20 years. Given the huge public investment in converting the Olympic Stadium into a Premier League football ground, we would expect all the partners involved to ensure that West Ham, at the very least, becomes an exemplar regarding disabled access. (Paragraph 40)
7. We concur with Ministers that it is in the sports' own interests to pay more attention to the—often very moderate—needs of such a large proportion of the UK population. Most clubs do not sell all the tickets for games, and a reputation for being well adapted and welcoming to disabled supporters should enhance their reputations

generally. Conversely, it could be considered a reputational risk—and one which sponsors would have to take seriously—if clubs continued to fail to engage with reasonable adjustments and thereby be in breach of the law. (Paragraph 41)

8. The Premier League told us that it would consider imposing sanctions on clubs that fail to provide sufficient accessibility. However, it is not clear whether this relates only to the physical modifications that should be made to stadia, rather than the broader view of the quality of the overall experience for supporters with disabilities. Given 20 years of comparative inactivity by the football leagues, we are not convinced that the Premier League would impose suitable penalties on clubs, even for failing to meet building regulations. (Paragraph 42)
9. *The Equality and Human Rights Commission has told us that it is minded to start legal proceedings against clubs that continue to flout the law. We support them in this action.* (Paragraph 43)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 10 January 2017

Members present:

Damian Collins, in the Chair

Andrew Bingham	Ian C. Lucas
Julie Elliott	Chris Matheson
Paul Farrelly	Jason McCartney
Nigel Huddleston	John Nicolson
Julian Knight	

Draft Report (*Accessibility of sports stadia*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 43 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 17 January at 10.00 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 24 May 2016

Question number

Joyce Cook OBE, Chair, Level Playing Field, and **Ruth Hopkins**, General Manager, Level Playing Field

[Q1–63](#)

Wednesday 25 May 2016

Justin Tomlinson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pensions, and **Nick Pontefract**, Head of Sports, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

[Q64–125](#)

Tuesday 18 October 2016

Bill Bush, Executive Director, Premier League, and **Steve Gilbert**, Wrexham Disabled Supporters Association

[Q126–189](#)

Lord Holmes of Richmond MBE, Disability Commissioner, Equalities and Human Rights Commission

[Q190–208](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ASS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 AccessAdvisr Ltd ([ASS0014](#))
- 2 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([ASS0018](#))
- 3 Dr Borja Garcia Garcia ([ASS0003](#))
- 4 Helen Ellis ([ASS0011](#))
- 5 Institute of Sound and Vibration Research ([ASS0016](#))
- 6 Level Playing Field ([ASS0017](#))
- 7 Mr Kelvin Trevett ([ASS0013](#))
- 8 Mr Stephen Draycott ([ASS0002](#))
- 9 Muscular Dystrophy UK Trailblazers ([ASS0004](#))
- 10 Plymouth Argyle Disabled Supporters Association (PADSA) ([ASS0009](#))
- 11 Stephen Kelly ([ASS0015](#))
- 12 The Racecourse Association ([ASS0005](#))
- 13 The Shippey Campaign ([ASS0010](#))
- 14 WFC Enables ([ASS0006](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	BBC Charter Review	HC 398
Second Report	Appointment of the Information Commissioner	HC 990
First Special Report	Tourism: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 382
Second Special Report	Society Lotteries: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 415

Session 2016–17

First Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online	HC 148 (HC 716 HC 763)
Second Report	Establishing world-class connectivity throughout the UK	HC 147 (HC 714)
Third Report	BBC White Paper and related issues	HC 150 (HC 715)
Fourth Report	Countries of Culture: Funding and support for the arts outside London	HC 114
First Special Report	BBC White Paper and related issues: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 715
Second Special Report	Establishing world-class connectivity throughout the UK: Responses to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 714
Third Special Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2016–17	HC 716
Fourth Special Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online: Information Commissioner's Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2016–17	HC 763