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Chair's Report

The highlight of the year was obviously the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow which enabled our athletes to represent the country at the highest level. The competition was in many areas intense and our athletes, especially the Para athletes doing especially well. It was also encouraging to see that many of the team will still be eligible for the next Games in India. A number of our athletes then participated in the European Championships in Birmingham and came away with a host of medals and impressive performances. At a junior level, our athletes are progressing well and the future in this area also looks very encouraging. Greater detail of our successes will be expanded upon within the report, but what can be established is that we are on the right projection for future medals at the future Games.

Without doubt the sport would not be able to function without a host of volunteers who participate at all levels in all weathers to ensure that competitions take place. A big thank you for your work and endeavours in enabling our sport to continue from the very youngest participant to those more experienced athletes.

Yet again, as we all know, the financial climate facing the sport is challenging, but every member of the board along with the staff working for Welsh Athletics are determined to ensure that a full array of activities are available to both our present athletes, and for future athletes who are embarking on their journey.

This is my final introduction to the Welsh Athletics Annual Report, as my term of office has now come to an end. They have been seven enjoyable years, and they have shown me once again what a fantastic sport athletics remains. Thank you to everyone who has supported both James and myself during this time, and I wish the new Chair, Nigel Walker, all the very best in his role.

Welsh Athletics Chair - Steve Perks

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General Council Report

The General Council have met every two months throughout the year, with the July meeting shared with Board members of Welsh Athletics. Our thanks go to Lynne Brier for chairing many meetings this year.

Attendees at General Council have included representatives from all four regions; who shared good practice with colleagues. Our regional councils offer Welsh Athletics members the opportunity to share views as to how we can sustain growth within the regions and association. General Council continue to monitor concerns raised regarding the financial challenges that regional councils and Welsh Athletics themselves are faced with.

Committee members across all disciplines; with the support of Welsh Athletics staff, have kept everyone updated regarding competitions and activities throughout the year. Thanks to all volunteers and staff who give their time to support our sport.

Presentations by Welsh Athletics staff members indicate the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes, which is appreciated by members, these included:

- CEO James Williams informing members of:
    - Developments and matters raised at both Board and UKA.
    - Proposed upgrades to facilities across Wales.
    - Matters relating to the Commonwealth Games from selection to the achievements of athletes representing Wales.
- Chris Anthony, outlining his new role as Development Officer and the introduction of Athletix.

Positive discussions have enabled members to share views from the athletics community and resulted in the reinstatement of the Fixtures Meeting, which will hopefully avoid clashes of dates, thus enabling athletes and officials to plan efficiently.

Issues identified as having an impact on the athletics community in Wales, which members felt that Welsh Athletics need to be aware of included:

- increased facilities and hire costs- this prompted a review by Welsh Athletics

- Trinity reports not having updated to include new age groups introduced by UKA.
- The New Power of 10 website – Difficulty in navigating for up-to-date athlete's data
- Incorrect/ outdated information on Welsh Athletics Website

Going forward we hope to engage younger members to share their views on how council members can improve our sport and how we can persuade them to take on roles within regions; including attending meetings, officiating and coaching.

Acting Chair - Joyce Tomala

The sport in Wales continues to go from strength to strength, with continued growth across all areas of the sport.

The organisation continues to support a vast array of activities, ensuring that the sport not only thrives but demonstrates its impact in areas such as health and wellbeing.

Financial

As with many small businesses across Wales, we continue to operate in a challenging financial climate. The continued challenges of funding and inflation is putting huge strains on our ability to invest, both in staffing and operational delivery to support the sport.

The financial year will show another small deficit of £9,027, albeit against a significant increase in turnover (£1,904,697, up £161,894 compared to the previous financial year).

The increase in club membership fees led to an increase in income of £43,138 compared to the previous year. We continue to explore new grant funding opportunities, working with new stakeholders and partners, this approach has seen a total of £116,790 of funding in additional to the £994,869 of Sport Wales funding.

We are also looking at new opportunities to generate income, one such initiative is the launch of the medical clinic based at NIAC. This enables athletes to access the same medial provision previously only open to our performance funded athletes. These initiatives has seen commercial income grow to £131,583, an annual increase of £37,803.

We are grateful for the support of our commercial partners, in particular Joma, Bearhug, Sportshoes and Polytan. The commercial market remains very tough, yet we continue to explore new partnerships to support the growth of the sport.

The increase in income has enabled record investment in the sport, with expenditure totalling £1,913,724.

The changes to National Insurance rates meant that the company incurred an additional cost of £25,266 compared to the previous year, despite staffing costs staying largely the same year to year.

A significant amount of investment in establishing the Athletix Programme led to an increase in expenditure in club development and grassroots of £49,038.

A total of £32,091 was invested to support specific women and girl initiatives including the Womens Running Conference, the Own The Night safety campaign and the Run, Throw, Glow programme in North Wales.

As the preparations for the Commonwealth Games ramped up, so did our investment in our performance programme, with increases of just under £20k in athlete support compared to the previous year and £22,425 increase in International competition and training camps.

The 2026/27 financial year will see a significant one off investment to support the Commonwealth Games delivery. The nature of Games means that additional costs are being borne by Welsh Athletics than in previous Games.

We remain cautious about the long term financial forecast, grant funding will remain challenging, and we will likely see increases in our delivery costs. We are also acutely aware of the cost of living impact on our members, so will aim to maintain the costs of our competitions and programmes as low as possible. Despite this, we will continue to explore new funding opportunities and explore new creative ways to generate income to enable us to reinvest into the sport.

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Commonwealth Games

The Glasgow Commonwealth Games was a huge focus for the organisation. The Games is the one opportunity that Welsh Athletics has to compete on the global stage. This four year cycle has been a challenging one to manage, for the first 2 years of the cycle it was unclear whether a Games would take place, with the original hosts of Victoria, Australia withdrawing from the hosting rights in 2024.

The Games in Glasgow had to be different, and so it proved to be – only 10 sports, and small team quotas as a result. The performances profiles of the events also indicated a much tougher nomination standard in comparison to previous Games.

Despite this, Welsh athletes continued to push performance levels, and 20 athletes achieved a nomination standard, with 12 having their nominations accepted by Team Wales. A further six para athletes were invited to compete based on the global rankings.

At the Games, the team performed brilliantly, with five medals won in para disciplines including tow Gold Medals from Aled Davies (Mens F44 Discus), Ilivia Breen (F38 Long Jump), two silvers from Olivia Breen (T38 100M), and Funmi Oduwaiye (F44 Discus) and a Bronze from Bree Cronin (F44 Discus).

There were also stand out performances from the likes of Jake Hayward, Jeremiah Azu, Charlotte Hendrich, Issy Boffey and Ava Lloyd, who all achieved a top 5 position.

Of the 18 athletes who competed at the Games, 14 athletes achieved a top 6 finish, matching the criteria required for selection by Team Wales.

The athletes were well supported by the Welsh Athletics performance team, with Team Leader Chris Type working closely with Team Wales colleagues to ensure that all logistical challenges were overcome.

Performance

This Summer also saw Britain host the European Championships for the first time, with the event taking place in Birmingham, just one week after the Commonwealth Games.

Seven Welsh Athletes were selected by UK Athletics, albeit only six competed following Issy Boffey's withdrawal following her exploits at the Commonwealth Games.

The Championship proved a successful one from a Welsh perspective, with multiple medallists. Jeremiah Azu continued his great form to pick up individual Siler in the 100m, this was followed by a gold medal in the men's and mixed 4x100m. This was the first time that any Welsh athlete had won three medals at a single European Championships.

He was closely followed by Charlotte Hendrich, who ended a superb season with two Relay Silvers – in the women's and mixed 4x400m. She also battled to a sixth place finish in the individual 400m, ending the Summer as the fastest teenager in the World.

Jake Hayward continued his comeback with a fourth place finish in the men's 1500, less than a second from taking the Gold.

Wales also had representation at the two major Junior events of the Summer, with Darcy Coslett a semi finalist in the 400m at the European U18 Championships, and Matilda Quick finishing 22nd in the Heptathlon at the World Junior's In Oregon, USA.

Development

The past twelve months saw the team launch a new junior programme – Athletix. This programme is focused on providing new opportunities for young people (from age 4 upwards) to engage in the sport in local, social settings. The pilot saw 6 clubs take on the initiative, and was supported by a new membership portal, resource cards and equipment packs.

Linked to this, we developed and launched a new coaching qualification The Athletix Activator. We hope that this new course will enable clubs to attract more coaches to support club activities, this byte size introduction to coaching will

hopefully remove barriers for new coaches to start their journey, and in time reduce waiting lists at clubs.

The Summer of Fun programme, saw close to 3,000 young people engage with Run, Jump, Throw activities through their education setting. Athletics was the largest sport in the programme, and we look forward to further growth in the coming year.

Another key focus has been reviewing the club governance framework, this will be launched at the start of the new affiliation year. It will enable us to have a better understanding of the challenges clubs are facing, and then in time put in place support functions to ensure our clubs are developing and removing the pressures on club officials.

From a membership perspective, we have seen steady growth over the past twelve months, tracking at just under 2%, the growth in consistent across the age groups, and we remain broadly 50:50 from a gender parity perspective.

Despite the low growth, we are seeing continued growth in wider participation rates, with the annual Sport & Active Lifestyle survey indicating that 315,000 adults are running regularly across Wales. This is seen in the continued growth in new social running groups starting across Wales – our recent desktop review indicates that there are approximately 300 groups, with only 70 registered with Run Wales.

We will explore the creation of a new membership tier to support social running group who wish to explore affiliation. We are aware that the steps to go from social to affiliated can be quite big, so the new tier will hopefully bridge that gap and enable the social running groups to develop their infrastructure in a timely manner.

This approach will not be forced on any group, we are aware that many social running groups are rightly proud of the informal and casual approach. This approach has certainly contributed to the huge growth in participation across Wales, we are keen to avoid negatively impacting on these groups by forcing formality on them.

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Competition

Its been another incredibly busy year, with continued growth in the number of licensed events across Wales. We continue to support our competition provider by advocating for reduction in road closure costs, and by speaking to Local Authorities in an attempt to remove any barriers for licensed events to take place.

That being said, we continue to see a steady rise in unlicensed events across Wales – these are often creating wider issues for the sector, and poor practice by some of these providers is impacting the sports reputation with stakeholders. We all have a duty to tackle this challenge and to advocate for safe and positive events for participants and volunteers alike.

With regards to this years Championships, the shining lights have been the Schools Championships. Record number of Schools and participants were recorded at the Inter-Schools Cross Country event in Brecon. Close to 100 secondary schools took part in the event, a significant increase on previous years. The Track & Field Championships In Aberdare saw another increase in participation – up nearly 8% on the previous years.

These events are a joint effort between Welsh Schools Athletics Association and Welsh Athletics, and we thank all the WSAA officers for their ongoing support of schools events across Wales.

The Welsh Cross Country Championships returned to Cardiff for the first time in nearly 20 years. Despite challenging conditions in the Capital, the event saw a unique double with Thomas and Emily Chaston, brother and Sister taking both the Mens and Womens Senior titles. The event also saw over 1100 entries for the event, another significant increase on previous years.

The Summer saw a return to North Wales, with the Welsh Junior Championships taking place at the recently refurbished Coleg Cambria Track in Deeside. The event was well supported by a committed group of officials and volunteers form Deeside AC. Entries were down on previous year, but the earlier date in the calendar saw a clash with the examination period – something that we will strive to avoid in future. Despite this, there was plenty of talent on show, and continues to demonstrate the positive future for the sport.

The Senior Championships in Cardiff incorporated the trials for the European Under 18 Championships. The two day event saw some of the best young athletes from across the UK compete alongside athletes preparing for the Commonwealth Games. Our ability to integrate and elevate the European Trials within our Championships has been recognised by UK Athletics – and the 2027 edition will host the European Trials for both U20 and U23 athletes.

This Summer was also the first with the new age groups – this has been a huge change for the sport, and its been great to see our clubs, competition providers, coaches and officials adapt to the new age groups so well. We will continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of the changes to ensure that it contributes positively in retention rates in the years ahead.

We continue to work with our competition providers to host Road, Mountain and Trail Championships across all age groups, including Masters. It was pleasing to see new events hosting Welsh Championships this year, with the inaugural Caerphilly 5k and the Richard Burton 10k races added to the Championship calendar. Our thanks to all competition providers who have supported Championship races this year.

Our competitions are supported by a large, passionate group of technical officials. Once again we have seen huge support from our officials, and it was superb to see a number being selected for the Commonwealth Games and European Championships, highlighting that Wales continues to have some of the best officials in the UK.

Equality Update

Removing barriers in our sport continues to be a significant focus area for Welsh Athletics.

In November we will be in front of the Insport assessment panel in the hope of achieving the Gold label status, marking another key milestone in embedding inclusivity in the sport.

The last twelve months has seen the launch of several new initiatives, including the further development of the Guide running workshop for fell and mountain, as well as a new Track and Field module. We have also seen further growth in the

number of para inclusive competitions across Wales, and welcomed our first Frame Runners to the Welsh Senior Championships in June.

Our work on the Moving 2 Inclusion framework continues to develop – this work has enabled us to further improve the way we communicate more broadly to and about the sport, with greater focus on diverse imagery and the capturing of best practice across the sport through case studies.

This Autumn we will continue our Womens safety campaign 'Own the Night', this campaign will call out the harassment that women face while out running. The campaign was a huge success last year, and has given us a platform to shine the light on this important area. The campaign this year will also have a focus on bystander training and male allyship – and we hope members will support the campaign and do all they can to raise awareness of this topic.

Looking ahead, we will also look to update the club framework, with us advocating for each club to have an inclusion and diversity Champion. We hope that by developing a network of Champions across Wales we can make further progress in ensuring our sport is safe and open to everyone to enjoy.

Sustainability

This continues to be an emerging area for the organisation and the sector as a whole. We are ensuring that we operate within the legal requirements for all our events, with full recycling facilities appearing at all our fixtures.

We are working with our suppliers and partners to not only minimise waste, but to explore new ways of maximising recycling. One such initiative is being explored with Brecon Carreg, where old plastic bottles are being recycled into foam rollers for athletes to use. This type of innovation is being driven by those in the sport, and we are keen to support further innovation.

We have recently commissioned a survey with colleagues from London Marathon, Great Run and England Athletics exploring the attitudes participants have to sustainable practices in the sector. We hope this insight will enable us to further support competition providers to not only minimise waste but to explore alternative approaches to event delivery.

Home Countries/UKA

Welsh Athletics continues to work closely with UK Athletics and the Home Countries. We continue to embed the changes in delivery of both Coach and Officials education, with the last twelve months seeing the focus on the development of a new Learning Management system to give the current and future coaches and officials a much improved customer experience.

The safeguarding training for coaches and officials will also be updated based on user feedback.

Work is also continuing to develop the pathway for both coaches and officials, and as we look ahead to the development of the next Welsh Athletics strategy, we will ensure that providing additional support of our volunteers will be a priority.

The strong and close working relationship that is in place with UK Athletics and the Home Countries enables us to share insight and best practice. The past year has seen discussions focused on maximising the impact of both the Commonwealth Games and European Championships, reviewing health and safety in light of the corporate manslaughter case and the launch of the new Power of 10 website.

We have also continued to monitor the impact of the age group change that came into effect in April, and put in place a Cross Country Management group to ensure a joined up approach to planning and supporting the winter programme.

As the sport continues to evolve, it is vital that we continue to forge close working relationships with our colleagues from UK Athletics and the Home Countries.

Sport Wales / Welsh Government

We continue to have a strong and close working relationship with Sport Wales. Welsh Athletics has a strong presence across a number of sector wide working groups and forums, including the development forum, the National coaching leaders forum and sit on the sector resilience group.

We are fully compliant with the Arwain governance Framework, and complete quarterly accountability submissions to Sport Wales. This enables us to retain

their full confidence and support of Sport Wales in the work we do. As CEO, I maintain strong communication with the Sport Wales CEO, Chair and Senior team.

The sector has a huge opportunity to work with the new Plaid Government, and advocate for the role that Sport plays to improve physical and mental wellbeing, plus help showcase Wales through our wonderful events structure.

We will look to continue to build links with Senedd Members and to advocate for more investment into Sport in the years ahead. We will also use this platform to advocate for more access to facilities and to support our volunteers across Wales.

Governance

Welsh Athletics continues to be fully compliant against the Sport Wales Arwain Framework, with the Governance and Risk Board sub group providing guidance and oversight of our Governance Improvement plan.

We have once again been classed as fully complaint with the UK Anti Doping Assurance Framework following our annual review.

From a safeguarding perspective we retain level 3 standard (the highest standard available), and remain one of just two Sports in Wales that have completed the Ann Craft Trust adult safeguarding framework.

Retaining the trust and support of our key stakeholders in crucial, especially considering the scope of our sport and our use of Sport Wales funding. Despite this confidence we are not complacent, and will continue to look at ways of improving the governance of the sport.

One such area is the need to ensure that the athlete's voice is included in the decision making structure or the sport. We will explore how we can further enhance the athletes voice over the coming year, and will look to work with the Board and General Council to explore how this can be best achieved.

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Looking Ahead

Nigel Walker will begin as the new Chair of Welsh Athletics in October. It will hopefully be a smooth transition for him as he has spent the year on the Board as Vice Chair – I am sure he will be keen to meet as many members as possible over the next year or so, and will ensure that the Board has strong and positive engagement with the sport at all times.

He succeeds Steve Perks, who steps down from the role at the end of his maximum term. I would like to personally thank Steve for his hard work, dedication and most importantly his support during his time as Chair. His term saw huge change in the governance of the sport, and he played a key role in fostering stronger links between Welsh Athletics and its principle partners including Team Wales, UKA and the Home Countries.

We are about to enter a crucial year for Welsh Athletics. Over the coming Months, we will be made aware of our new indicative funding from Sport Wales – this will enable us to plan for the coming four years.

Aligned to this, we will embark on a National consultation with the sport as part of setting a new strategy for the sport. This will enable our members to identify the areas that they want to see prioritised by the Governing Body, and in turn we will set out how we will aim to achieve these ambitions.

All of this will happen against a backdrop of continued demand for our sport, as we will no doubt see the sport continue to grow. We cannot take this growth for granted however, we know that young people in particular have so many more options to consider – we need to ensure that our offer meets the demands of young people, and that we prioritise their experience above all else.

We need to ensure that the athletes voice is at the heart of everything we do, this may mean new delivery models that some may find uncomfortable. We have to be brave, and not be afraid to fail should new initiatives not work in the way we hope.

Can I finish by thanking our passionate volunteers, our clubs, our coaches and our officials. You are the lifeblood of our sport. So many of our volunteers go above and beyond to ensure that over half a million people have an opportunity to engage with our sport each and every week. Diolch!

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CEO – James Williams

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