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**Mrs Theresa Villiers MP  
Chipping Barnet Constituency  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA**

**27th September 2010**

Dear Theresa,

**UK SPORT FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST - DECISION NOTICE**

Thank you for your letters dated 21st May, 4th June, 13th July and 21st July 2010, all of which were safely received and I apologise for not acknowledging them previously.

I am aware that my athletics colleagues have contacted The Minister for Sport expressing their frustration at the slowness of change from a sport under the control of UK Sport and Sport England. I am personally satisfied by the philosophy of the "Big Society", which I understand to mean that the voluntary sector will be allowed to rebuild the sport after the delivery of the 2012 Olympic Games. Clearly in a decent society the publicly funded "sporting professionals" with families and mortgages must be weaned off the gravy train and culture of self importance with due process. I appreciate that these matters take time to resolve.

However it must not be forgotten that public money has failed to deliver any benefit to Athletics. Furthermore it has inflicted great harm at a personal level in terms of preventing athletes from competing at world level athletics championships. Athletes, now in their mid to late 20's who hoped to participate at an Olympic Games, who won the trials and achieved the qualifying standard in 2004 and 2008, were denied selection for political reasons. These athletes would have highlighted to government that UK Sport were nothing more than gamblers with public money. Cheating gamblers at that. The hard working and dedicated athletes who did not receive funding from UK Sport or any sponsor, but still rose to become the best in the country, will not get another chance to compete at an Olympic Games.

UK Sport represent a stain on public service in the UK. It is likely that at the 2012 Olympics an increased number of athletic events will be void of any British representation. After 10 years of UK Sport's money together with the Coaching expertise of UK Athletics, many of our best athletes can no longer even achieve the qualifying standard.

Aside from the competitors, the so called "modernisation" process replaced many volunteer administrators, officials and coaches with an expensive, unsustainable and inferior system of management. The culture for volunteering for administrative duties in athletics will need to be rebuilt from scratch.

The most obvious harm caused by the misspending of millions of pounds of public money, is the lower standards of achievement which can be measured by the performances of the 10th and 50th ranked individuals over all athletic events. The second benchmark of failure is the reduction in participation levels which can be measured by the lower numbers competing in the various County championships on the Road, Cross Country and Track. The millions of pounds wasted by UK Sport and Sport England has had a double negative impact because not only has it failed to produce any positive benefit, it has prevented others from doing a better job.

On a more positive note, I am aware of the Minister for Sport's intention to focus his energy on a structure which promotes competition at a local level, and funnels those successful teams and individuals into national finals at the top of the pyramid. This is the best way to promote sport for sport's sake, and I wish him every success. Athletics already enjoys a success based competition structure which I hope will be supported by the Minister's plans, and not duplicated.

Before we can finally draw a line under the mistakes of the past, I would like to draw your attention to the attached decision notice in respect of my freedom of information request. I asked to see the reports that UK Athletics were required to provide to UK Sport in return for the millions of pounds funding. I requested these reports on 6th May 2008, and now in September 2010 we have reached the end of the first stage of the FOI process. It transpires that UK Sport and UK Athletics entered into a confidentiality agreement on 31st March 2009, a year after my request for information. UK Athletics wrote to the Information Commissioners Office a year later, on 30th April 2010, stating "unequivocally" that confidentiality was a prerequisite of its agreement to engage with UK Sport's monitoring and accountability processes back in 2007.

Of course this is complete nonsense. UK Sport created UK Athletics and selected the senior staff as has been stated in Parliament on several occasions. It is clear that UK Sport are the organisation hiding from scrutiny, and they are using their control of UK Athletics to shield themselves from the Freedom of Information act. The idea that UK Athletics would drag UK Sport through the courts if they ever revealed the methods used to help athletes to run faster, jump higher or throw farther is absurd. The idea that UK Athletics would have declined funding rather than share coaching secrets is laughable. The fact that UK Athletics have failed to achieve any sporting improvements suggests that the secret coaching methods are a smoke-screen to hide the fact that they have no ideas about how to improve standards in athletics.

UK Athletics claim they are protecting training secrets which give British Athletes an advantage over competitors. Such a claim is ridiculous. During January and February of this year Christine Ohuruogu spent 4 weeks training in Jamaica with Usain Bolt. She is quoted in the Evening Standard on 10th March 2010 as having said "The Jamaicans train really, really hard - there were two sessions a day for six days a week - and it was definitely a step-up from what I am used to". It would appear that Usain Bolt and Jamaica do not feel the same need to protect secrets as UK Athletics/UK Sport do.

Tom McNab is a former national coach for the British Team and would be well known to the likes of Daley Thomspon and Sebastian Coe. When I advised him of the "sporting secrets" line being peddled by UK Sport/UK Athletics he said:

"I produced a Technical Report post 1968/72 Olympics, available to all nations. The idea that there are coaching 'secrets' similar to those held by MI5/6 is ludicrous. In any case, all methods must inevitably be part of the national coach education programmes, and therefore freely available. This is a Dead Zone, 'how many angels can rest on the point of a needle' territory. There are no secrets to hide."

UK Sport's undignified scramble to create, and then justify confidentiality makes one despair about the quality of the thinking that is taking place at public expense. The fact that the Information Commissioner can be fooled by such a chaotic and backdated confidentiality agreement, and overlook a transparent funding agreement which demands regular reports and accountability, is depressing.

Thankfully we now have a new government with clean hands in charge. I have appealed to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights), and have opted for an oral hearing. I am optimistic about the attendance of internationally respected Coaches, Administrators and Statisticians to speak in favour of the need for openness. I would be most grateful if you would ask The Minister for Sport, Hugh Robertson MP to find out what is going on at UK Sport/UK Athletics, and possibly force the release of all the quarterly reports that UK Athletics are required to submit to UK Sport as part of the funding agreement. I would also like to see the notes produced by UK Sport in respect of each of these reports.

Success at the Olympics should be the pinnacle of all athletic achievement, so for UK Sport and UK Athletics to cause it to become shrouded in a cloak of secrecy, with all the suspicion and doubt which accompanies such practices is shameful. I hope the Minister for Sport will support our attempts to ensure transparency in athletics.

Yours sincerely

C.Zacharides