

Dawn Bowden MS
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport and Chief Whip
Welsh Government

Dyddiad | Date: 18 July 2022

Pwnc | Subject: Financial pressures on leisure centres

Dear Dawn,

I have been contacted by the Welsh Sports Association (WSA), Freedom Leisure Centre Trust and Community Leisure UK regarding their concerns about the financial pressures on sports and leisure facilities as a result of increased costs and reduced income. These increased costs arise from increasing energy prices, supply chain issues raising the cost of pool chemicals, increased food and beverage costs and the rise in the National Minimum Wage. At the same time, customer numbers have not recovered since the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis has left many households with less disposable income meaning they are more likely to forego leisure activities in favour of paying for necessities.

I understand that direct support to leisure centres via the Local Government Hardship fund ceased at the end of March 2022 and that this support was transferred to the revenue support grant received by Local Authorities. However, leisure centres have reported that this support has not reached them, and they continue to face severe financial hardships.

I am attaching a briefing note from Community Leisure UK and WSA which sets out these issues in greater detail. I am concerned that the impact of these pressures will result in fewer people having access to leisure facilities and increasing the inequality of access to sport, which is the topic of our inquiry into access to sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. In particular, swimming pools are most vulnerable to the threat of reduced hours and closure due to their large overheads and fixed costs. Lack of access to swimming facilities will not only have an adverse impact on Wales' elite performance but also deprive many young people of learning an essential life skill. It is important that children learn to swim in a safe and supervised environment, rather than in open water during the warmer weather.

I would be grateful if you could address the section under the heading 'Asks to Welsh Government' in the attached document in your reply to the Committee. Please could you also set out what the Welsh Government is doing to ensure continued access to leisure centres, in particular swimming pools, to safeguard equality of access to, and to avoid the permanent loss of, these vital facilities.

Yours sincerely,

Delyth Jewell

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Chair

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament