

Stop outsourcing at the Plas Menai National Outdoor Centre for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 6 Chwefror 2023
Petitions Committee | 6 February 2023

Reference: SR23/4917-1

Petition Number: Petition P-06-1315

Petition title: Stop outsourcing at the Plas Menai National Outdoor Centre for Wales

Text of petition: Sport Wales has invited tenders for an external organisation to take over the running of its National Outdoor Activities Centre at Plas Menai, near Caernarfon, including the employment of its staff, and we are concerned about what this might mean for employees and the activities they provide. Previous experience suggests that outsourcing does not benefit staff, quality of service or the taxpayer.

We call on the Welsh Government to stop this process and keep Plas Menai in the public sector.

Plas Menai offers a range of courses, activity days and personal tuition in outdoor pursuits like sailing, windsurfing and mountain biking. For 40 years, it has made a major contribution to the outdoor activities sector in Wales, providing essential skills to individuals and groups. The reach of those who have worked in, and trained at, the Centre stretches across Europe and the world, which is testament to the Centre's emphasis on providing the highest quality instruction and learning.

Plas Menai's dedicated and highly skilled staff would be happy for Sport Wales to seek ways of improving the Centre and even to make use of external expertise in doing so. But they do not want this unique facility – and their own jobs – to be handed over to a new provider, which could put profit ahead of any commitment to public service and fair employment practices. They are also concerned that a change of provider might compromise the Centre's ability to provide services through the medium of Welsh.



1. Background

Plas Menai, the National Outdoor Centre for Wales, is owned by Sport Wales to encourage participation in outdoor activities. The centre offers a range of technical courses and instructor training in dinghy sailing, windsurfing, powerboating, cruising and kayaking.

A [written statement from the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport](#) in September 2022 explained the background to this situation:

In 2017, following an independent review, there was a recommendation to explore options for the management of Plas Menai whilst retaining it within public ownership and aligned with the strategic goals of Sport Wales. Sport Wales subsequently determined that the best way to achieve this was to identify a strategic partner, which shares its values and aspirations for Plas Menai while also sharing the financial risk of operating the centre.

Over the past year, Sport Wales has conducted a thorough procurement process to identify that strategic partner and today is announcing Parkwood Leisure has been appointed. Parkwood brings extensive knowledge and experience of the outdoor and leisure sector together with innovative delivery proposals.

This approach will bring in sector experience and expertise to grow the business as a year-round sporting destination, which will enable the long-term growth and development of Plas Menai. The partnership approach will ensure that all staff at the centre will have their terms and conditions of employment protected and that Plas Menai will retain its status as the National Outdoor Centre, operated on a not-for-profit basis.

On 20 September 2022 [Sport Wales announced that it would be forming a partnership with Parkwood at Plas Menai](#). It said:

From 30 January 2023, Parkwood Leisure will take on the day to day running of the Centre for an initial ten year period. The buildings and land will continue to be owned by Sport Wales. A strategic partnership group comprising representatives from Sport Wales, Parkwood Leisure and staff working at Plas Menai will monitor the performance of the

partnership. As well as growing and enhancing the current services the partnership must safeguard staff employment terms and conditions.

2. Welsh Parliament action

On 21 September the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport responded to a topical question from Heledd Fychan MS asking:

What discussions has the Deputy Minister held with local stakeholders and union representatives on the protection of workers' rights following the recent announcement regarding the outsourcing of services at Plas Menai National Outdoor Centre?

Key parts of the Deputy Minister's response included:

"I have held discussions on workers' rights with officials of the recognised union at Plas Menai, with Sport Wales, and with Siân Gwenllian, the constituency Senedd Member for the local area. Yesterday's announcement by Sport Wales confirms that Parkwood must safeguard staff employment terms and conditions, and I'm reassured that Sport Wales has followed a thorough engagement process with the staff and the union."

"As you'll know, Plas Menai has had some difficulties over a number of years, and there have been a number of different options that have been presented to how we could safeguard and move that forward."

"In terms of the specification and the contract, we have been very clear that the well-being of future generations Act has to be complied with, and that is written into the contract, as is a requirement for Parkwood Leisure to comply with the Sport Wales strategy and to be aligned with the Welsh Government's programme for government, along with the well-being of future generations Act. As you know, one of the seven ways of working includes the commitment and the development of the Welsh language. Parkwood Leisure have absolutely committed to all of that. In terms of the conditions of the employment for the people who work there, which was a primary consideration that I had, and I know that Sport Wales had, they have written into the contract a guarantee that terms and conditions for the employees at Plas Menai will be guaranteed, including their pension rights, for the entire period of the contract. They have also agreed within the terms of the contract that

there will be no two-tier workforce, so that any new staff that are brought in after the commencement of the contract would also be employed on the existing terms and conditions that are currently enjoyed by the staff at Plas Menai.”

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