

Can Swim Wales expand (and other witnesses comment on) on their proposal of statutory protection for swimming pools? Should this be broadened to other sport facilities?

- Statutory protection for all public sporting facilities merits serious exploration and consideration. Stresses on public finances mean that public access to sporting facilities from swimming pools to parkland and grass pitches is under increasing strain. However, it is important to stress that funding must follow any statutory protection – present levels of capital investment are insufficient to ensure the entire public estate is modern, safe, and efficient. There is a case, often expressed by Local Authority leaders that without sufficient funding a statutory protection becomes a set of minimum standards rather than a robust means of preventing swinging cuts.
- Netball sees at least one league a year significantly disrupted by centre closure that could be eased by statutory protection.

What else could the Welsh Government do, beyond additional funding, to mitigate the impact of reduced funding on sports?

- There are a number of areas in which regulatory action could assist the sport sector.
 - For example, a significant number of sports clubs are pursuing the installation of Electric Vehicle charging points as a means of raising revenue. Installation is being slowed by hold ups within the regulatory regime, as well as slow wider decision making within local authorities.
 - There are particular challenges around the renewal and installation of artificial pitches with respect to drainage.
 - The Welsh Government Sport Policy Unit already plays a strong role in convening the sector with civil servants and officials in other departments. This should continue and be strengthened.

How has the Welsh Government's approach to using sport as a public health measure changed in the last decade?

- Whilst there was a marked shift in tone during the pandemic – with a huge emphasis on the importance of exercise and access to the outdoors, overall our judgement is that practically there has been relatively little movement over the previous decade. Engagement with the health service in particular appears to be relationship or locally based and not systematised. Whilst there have been promising developments around the use of the education estate, progress has been slow and again appears relatively localised.

To what extent has the Welsh Government used the importance placed on physical activity during the pandemic to drive an increase in sports participation?

- Evidence suggests that whilst there were increases in participation by some demographic groups during and following the pandemic, this was largely amongst already active people. In the years post pandemic, we have seen relatively static participation rates across the population – as we had in the years prior to the pandemic.

- It is certainly the case that price increases following the inflationary pressures post-pandemic and the War in Ukraine are exerting pressure on people's ability to participate in paid for activity.
- Wales Netball has seen an improvement in their membership and participation post pandemic – however this may be attributable to a marked effort by the Governing Body to increase its profile in the wider sport. It is difficult to untangle the extent to which wider Government messaging might have played a role.

The Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee, and a number of charities, have called for a 'preventative' category of spend in future Welsh Government budgets, moving towards a longer-term budgeting view to help build and protect population health. What are your views on this?

- There is merit to this suggestion – though the full implications of how this could apply to or within the sport sector, where a sizeable portion of spend is in salaries. The biggest benefit of this approach may be to open the ability to bid for funding from other government portfolios, especially health.

Have you applied for Sport Wales's additional funding announced this September? Do you have any comments about the pace and design of this funding?

- Sport Wales distributed the additional funding according to their existing funding formula. Funded partners were informed of this on the day of the Welsh Government announcement (5th September), with offer letters received the following week. Funds were in recipient organisations bank accounts by early October. Sport Wales should be congratulated on the transparency and speed of their process – reflecting the way in which the earlier cuts in December 2023 had been communicated openly and honestly and at pace to allow their partners to plan. More broadly whilst all organisations welcome the additional funding, it is unfortunate that it is in-year funding. This allows for little planning and requires a very quick turnaround on spend. Multiyear funding certainty remains a priority ask to allow the greatest efficacy of intervention.
- Several members have reported that the sum they received from this allocation of in year funds is roughly equal to the amount they will have to pay in additional National Insurance contributions following the UK Government budget of 30 October. Our current best estimate is that members have additional payroll costs of up to £200,000 per annum because of the employer National Insurance contribution increase. Across our National Governing Body and Leisure Service members, the total additional cost could be around £2m - we continue to investigate this figure and will provide further detail as soon as possible.

Andrew Howard

Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive Officer