

Follow up questions for CCWLSIR Committee - 24 October 2024

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

A) Over the past 10 years all of us have seen first-hand the increased pressures on pool owners and operators - a 'perfect storm' of COVID (temporary closure and loss of income), the subsequent energy crisis and then the reductions in Central Government and Local Authority investment into facilities combined. The recent Swim Wales National Facilities Audit 2024 informs us that 80% of swimming pools in Wales are over 20 years old, with 50% being built prior to 1979 and only 2 built in the last 10 years. In the last 10 years, only 11 sites across all 22 local authorities in Wales have received major refurbishment or renovation.

The funding model for the majority of public use (260+ non-statutory public owned pools in Wales) facilities mean that they are not eligible for many grants, and a lack of capital funds in relation to need has meant a significant shortfall between investment versus the rising maintenance and running costs. Many pools in Wales have already had to either close their doors, significantly reduce operating hours or increase costs to unprecedented levels which is impacting accessibility and affordability.

There is no protection currently, local authorities have the power to remove this public service and cut participation. With the pressures increasing weekly and monthly multiple closures are becoming a reality. Public campaigns, local protests and petitions are commonplace across many councils indicating the strength of public sensitivity support. Never before in Wales have we seen leisure centres (and by association pools) so vulnerable, statutory protection is the only way that we can guarantee that 500,000 children & adults (current levels) REMAIN aquatically active in Wales, a huge contribution to health and wellbeing for our Welsh public.

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

A) There are several interventions that we see available to the current administration. Some suggestions from Swim Wales would be;

- Ensuring (not just encouraging) collaboration amongst departments such as sport, health, education and transport
- Signposting projects and initiatives across government that can help with the sports mission, there are many projects and opportunities that can be supported by pooled resources and co-production
- Advocating for sport in relation to the health benefits, international relations and employment at every opportunity using positions of influence to broadcast the 'power of sport and leisure'

- Creating a shared 'prevention' fund where NGB and other associated sports providers can access EXTRA funding through collaborative projects with other departments.

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

A) The narrative in this area has changed slightly over the last 10 years but this has been, and continues to be, a very slow process. We see good progress at local authority level, with many adopting joint programmes with us like GOOD BOOST <https://www.goodboost.ai/about-us>

Many other nations (UK & European) are highly active in collaborative partnership between sport and health, or education and transport to ensure that the long term benefits of active and healthy lifestyle. There is currently some great collaboration in Scotland through the newly formed health, social care and sport committee of the Scottish parliament. This group bring cross party and cross department discussions to the table regarding health services in Scotland to include primary care, GPs, and pharmacy services, public health including mental health and wellbeing, and tackling drug and alcohol misuse social care THROUGH sport and physical activity. Unfortunately, trying to get Wales to engage in similar short to medium term activities in order to see medium to long term benefits has escaped the various administrations that we have had over the last 10 years.

Swim Wales hopes that the appointment of a former health minister as First minister of Wales will help 'shift the dial'.

One good example of collaboration was initiated 6 years ago in the form of the Healthy and Active Fund (HAF). This was a four-year grant funding programme (funded by Health & Sport) which allocated £5.85 million to 17 projects across Wales which sought to improve participants' mental and physical health by enabling active lifestyles. The report below presents the findings of a programme level evaluation of the HAF, unfortunately we have not seen anything since.

[https://www.gov.wales/evaluation-healthy-and-active-fund-final-report#:~:text=The%20Healthy%20and%20Active%20Fund%20\(HAF\)%20was%20a%20four%2D,level%20evaluation%20of%20the%20HAF](https://www.gov.wales/evaluation-healthy-and-active-fund-final-report#:~:text=The%20Healthy%20and%20Active%20Fund%20(HAF)%20was%20a%20four%2D,level%20evaluation%20of%20the%20HAF)

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

A) This has been an area of strength since COVID, with Welsh Government have made funding available to community sport and grass roots participation (via Sport Wales) through projects like the WINTER OF WELLBEING, SUMMER OF FUN and BE ACTIVE, all of these programmes have helped upskill volunteers in areas where community clubs lack expertise or experience. They have supported

clubs in the development of innovative projects that promote physical activity in new or different ways clubs utilising technology to engage more people in physical activity outreach aimed at people who are currently under-represented in sport and physical activity. Aquatic clubs have benefited to the figure of just under £180,000 from these funds alone.

The SPORT CAPITAL FUND has also benefited many of our communities by helping them improve facilities or purchase equipment that allows more people to participate in our sport such as timing systems, new changing facilities or starting blocks. To date this has supported aquatics by more than £200,000.

5) 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?

A) A preventative category would be very welcomed by Swim Wales and the aquatic community at large, we have several examples of our own here – Good Boost, GP Referral Scheme and NHS Muscular Skeletal project (MSK) to support people with neck and back pain injuries, lower limb injuries including groin, hip, knee, ankle and foot, upper limb injuries including shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand, joint problems. We have also seen huge impact when using aquatics exercise/swimming in areas post-operative rehabilitation and occupational work disorders.

Swim Wales would love to be involved in any preventative/long term strategy, pilot or initiative to support this idea.

6) 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?

A) Swim Wales applied for and were awarded £57,000 in the additional funding round this autumn. This funding was very much appreciated and unbudgeted. Unfortunately it only served to offset a range of operational costs increased across facility hire or filling the gap of last year's cuts. The speed and access to this funding through Sport Wales was excellent, while we remain very grateful for extra funding the visibility remains very short term and hard to plan with operationally, especially 'in year' availability with a cut off on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

We hope this helps, please do not hesitate to get in touch with myself or the wider team for any other support. We are once again extremely grateful for the committees time and interest on these important subjects.

KR,

Fergus

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