

Save Pembroke Pool - Improve Don't Remove

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 28 Ebrill 2025
Petitions Committee | 28 April 2025

Reference: SR25/10583/1

Petition Number: P-06-1504

Petition title: Save Pembroke Pool - Improve Don't Remove

Text of petition: Pembroke Pool is under threat of closure due to huge funding gaps in providing services in Pembrokeshire. Whilst we recognise this is a Pembrokeshire County Council issue, it highlights the need for more funds to reach rural communities from the Senedd. We call on Welsh Government (WG) to provide additional funds, ring-fenced to upgrade our tired leisure services that are such an all important social hub in all our communities. Without a commitment from WG the threat of closure looms over us with every annual budget consultation.



1. Background

Welsh Government funding of culture and sport is largely channelled through arm's-length bodies, such as the Arts Council of Wales, Sport Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum Wales. Sport Wales distributes funding to community clubs, volunteers, and athletes. It annually distributes capital funding to improve sports facilities (£3.5 million in 2024-25), including local authority facilities.

In 2023-24, local authorities spent £260 million on libraries, culture, heritage, sport and recreation. Since 2013-14 this spending has reduced by 28% in real terms, whilst spending on education and social services has increased substantially.

1.1. Reduced public funding for sport and culture

In 2023-24 the Welsh Government cut the revenue funding of all culture and sport bodies by between 5 and 15% (the Books Council received the highest percentage cut) in a budget that saw funding swinging to health and social services.

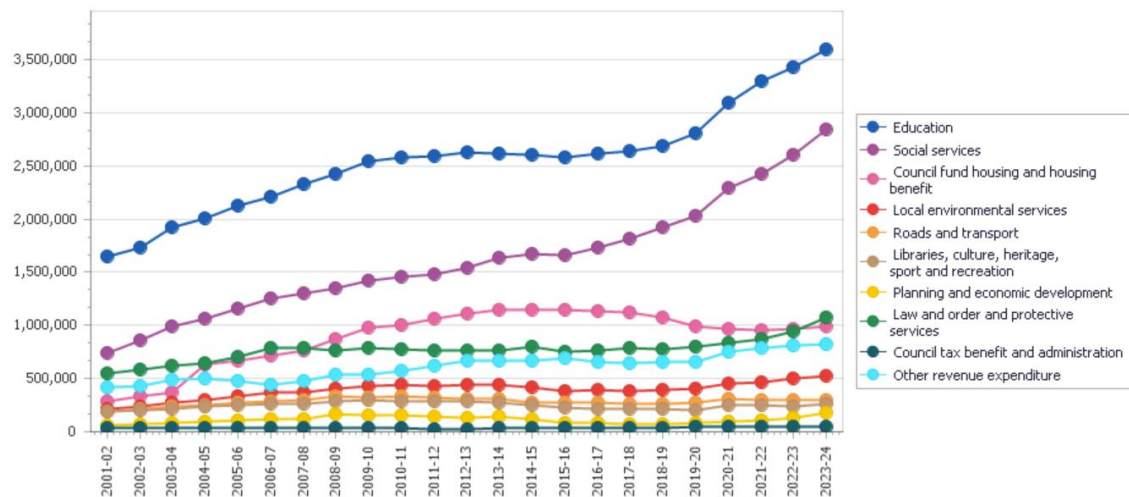
In total, 2024-25 saw the Welsh Government cut revenue funding for culture and sport by 7.7% compared to 2023-24 allocations. Capital funding, which is less than half the value of revenue allocations, increased by 6.3%.

This meant that, by its own calculations, the Welsh Government had cut revenue budgets in these areas by 17% in real-terms over a decade. Over the same period, capital budgets (which are still less than half the size of revenue budgets) almost tripled in size.

Provision of culture, sport and recreation services is mostly discretionary for local authorities. Between 2013-14 and 2023-24, local authority revenue funding of libraries, culture, heritage, sport and recreation reduced by 28% in real terms, whilst spending on education and social services increased substantially.

Local authority revenue outturn by service (£000s) (2001-2 to 2023-24)

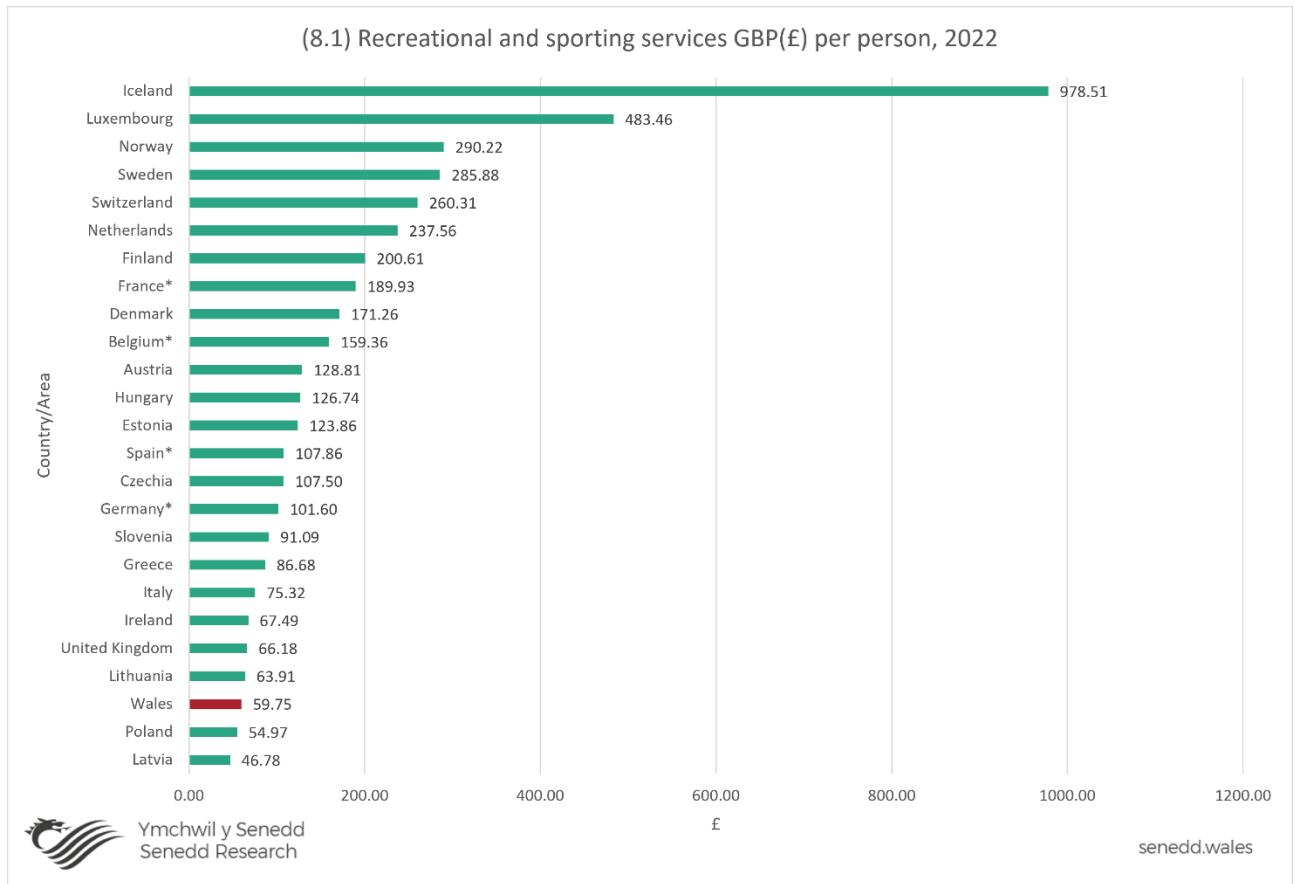
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Source: *Stats Wales*

Following these prolonged real-terms cuts from central and local government, public funding of culture and sport in Wales is among the lowest in Europe. [Analysis from Senedd Research](#) compared public spending on culture and sport with 24 European countries (including the UK as a whole) for which data was available.

The average spend on recreation and sporting services in these countries is £187.74 per person. In Wales the figure is £59.75 per person, or 32% of the average of these countries. This placed Wales third from bottom of the countries under consideration.



Source: Senedd Research analysis of Welsh Government, StatsWales and OECD data

1.2. Increases for culture and sport in the 2025-26 Final Budget

When the Welsh Government published its 2025-26 Draft Budget in December 2024, it had reversed many of the cuts to culture and sport it implemented in the 2023-24 Budget.

In the Final Budget, published in February 2025, culture and sport saw an additional revenue increase of £4.6m. That means a real-terms increase for these areas between 2023-24 and 2025-26 of about 1%.

1.3. Local authority funding increases by 4.5%

In the 2025-26 Final Budget, the Welsh Government increased core funding for local authorities by an average of 4.5%. Pembrokeshire received a 3.8% uplift, or about £8.5 million on a like-for-like comparison with 2024-25.

As part of its budget agreement with Jane Dodds MS, leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Government **implemented a funding floor in the Final Local Government Settlement**. This means that no authority will receive less than a 3.8% uplift in its funding for 2025-26. Nine local authorities benefitted from the funding floor, **including Pembrokeshire**. In the provisional local government settlement, the local authority was expecting a 3.5% uplift in its core revenue budget.

The Final Local Government Settlement also sets out **some of the other sources of Welsh Government funding** that local authorities can access. This includes £1.1bn of capital grants, including £200m of general capital funding, which is £20m more than 2024-25. In addition, the Welsh Government has provided as £1.3bn of specific grants to support some of its policy priorities.

The **Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government, Jayne Bryant MS, acknowledges** the “considerable financial pressures faced by local authorities”. Prior to publication of the Draft Budget, the WLGA **estimated pressures on local authority budgets totalling** £559m in 2025-26.

The WLGA talks about two broad categories mainly responsible for the pressure faced by local authorities: inflation (including things like pay increases) and demand. It **says pressures are** “unrelenting” and estimates further pressures of £454m in 2026-27 and £464m in 2027-28.

The **two big individual areas of pressure** are Social Care and Schools. In 2025-26, these service areas make up around 40% and 22% of budget pressures respectively.

Following publication of the Provisional Settlement in December, **a member of the WLGA warned** that without the necessary funding “the ability of our essential local services to fulfil statutory duties, and support residents’ needs will be severely impeded”.

Pembrokeshire County Council has **approved its budget for 2025-26**, including a 9.35% council tax increase, and noting a funding gap of £27 million, which will be met by a combination of budget savings, an increase in Council Tax and use of Council Tax premiums.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government’s response to this petition notes:

The Welsh Government continues to prioritise frontline public services including local government as far as possible in our budget decisions. Local Government funding for 2025- 2026 in the Welsh Government’s final budget increases by £262m compared to, on a similar basis, to the final settlement for 2024-2025, an average increase of 4.5%. This includes floor funding at 3.8% which benefits Pembrokeshire.

This core funding for local authorities is distributed on a range of factors including sparsity of population, in order to recognise the costs of service delivery in rural areas.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In 2024 the Senedd’s Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee conducted an inquiry into the impact of funding reductions on culture and sport.

The Committee heard from Swim Wales that the condition of aquatic facilities in Wales has been “in steady decline for a decade” and that 30 per cent of swimming pools are at risk of closure over the next decade if action is not taken by central and local governments. They said that: “once a facility is closed, the cost of reopening or replacing it is often prohibitive, leading to a lasting reduction in community services.”

Among other things, the Committee called for the Welsh Government to reach parity of funding with similar countries. The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation in principle, and responded with funding increases in the 2025-26 Final Budget. The Committee also recommended:

- The Welsh Government should develop a school swimming strategy to ensure that children leaving primary school have the ability to swim. This strategy should recognise the importance of providing adequate facilities and transport.

The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation in principle, whilst saying:

“Decisions on the level of funding available to schools and to other services are made by each authority as part of their overall budget and council tax setting.”

The Senedd debated the Draft Budget 2025-26 on 4 February 2025, and debated the Final Budget and the Local Government Settlement on 04 March 2025.

Title:

The Local Government and Housing Committee scrutinised the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government on 15 January 2025. The Committee also took evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on 08 January 2025. Conclusion 1 of the Committee's report on the draft budget stated:

Conclusion 1. We would like to see a full review of the local government funding formula and that local authorities with an older and ageing population are adequately reflected in the formula.

The Welsh Government accepted the conclusion in principle, noting that:

The fundamental principle of the formula is that this funding is distributed according to relative need. The largest drivers of service expenditure are population levels, deprivation levels and sparsity and over three quarters of the funding is distributed through the local government settlement funding formula relies on data which is updated annually

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.