

# P-06-1327 Leisure Centre amenities free for children

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Mai 2023  
Petitions Committee | 15 May 2023

Reference: SR23/5702-1

**Petition Number:** P-06-1327

**Petition title:** Leisure Centre amenities free for children

**Text of petition:** The students members of Ysgol Mynydd Bychan's Senedd strongly believe that Leisure Centre amenities should be free for children in Wales. This would help us keep fit and lead healthy lives.



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# 1. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government's response to this petition summarises its policies for providing free access to sports for young people. These include:

- The Welsh Government provides funding, through Sport Wales, for local authorities to offer free swimming to children and young people aged 16 and under. The scheme provides a free splash session every weekend in every pool and two additional sessions in the summer holidays. Local authorities also provide targeted support to encourage young people from areas of deprivation to participate in the Free Swimming scheme.
- £7m in one-off funding towards the Summer of Fun 2022, which formed part of a wider package of support to help with the cost-of-living crisis facing families across Wales. The initiative built on the previous Summer of Fun 2021 and the Winter of Wellbeing, which were also one-off funding initiatives aimed at recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2. Welsh Parliament action

Concerns about the impact of the increased cost of living on leisure facilities have been raised in the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee (during its work on [the impact of increased costs on culture and sport](#)) and Local Government and Housing Committee (in its work on [local authority library and leisure services](#)).

### 2.1. Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

During its work on the impact of the increased cost of living on culture and sport, the Committee heard that increased costs would lead to activity restrictions, price increases and possible closure of leisure services. In November 2022 it recommended the Welsh Government provide “additional targeted funding to the sports and culture sectors to help venues and organisations that face closure but have a sustainable future beyond the immediate crisis.”

The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation. In its response it highlighted an additional £3.75 million for culture and sport during the 2022-23 financial year to help with “exceptional inflationary pressures to utility costs and costs of living pressures at the arm's length bodies and also local sector

organisations". This extra funding has not led to targeted funding to help organisations survive the period of increased costs, as the Committee called for.

During the inquiry, Andrew Howard from the Welsh Sports Association described the particular vulnerability of swimming pools, which have high energy bills, and have experienced other shocks, such as increased costs for cleaning chemicals.

The Committee reiterated its call for additional support for sport and leisure facilities, and in particular, swimming pools, in a [letter to the Welsh Government](#) in April 2023. This followed the announcement of £63 million of support for swimming pools in England in the UK Government's Spring Budget.

## 2.2. Local Government and Housing Committee

On 29 March 2023, the Welsh Sports Association and Swim Wales stressed the need for additional funding whilst giving [evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee](#). Fergus Feeney from Swim Wales referred to the scale of funding needed: "Just outlining the gap, we think between £10 million and £12 million, best case. But we start at about £30 million. So, this is a significant problem."

Mr Feeney described the impact of price increases on children learning to swim:

The average lesson pre COVID was £6.50 for a swimming lesson, and post-COVID, in the current environment across Wales, the average cost of a swimming lesson is £12.50. So, we've nearly doubled the cost of a swimming lesson. Those children in those harder-to-reach areas, underserved areas, socially and economically deprived areas, have no chance, and that's why school swimming is so important. We celebrate the 150,000 who are in those lessons—that's fantastic—but they're the ones that can afford it. We're going to have a situation very soon where, dare I say it, white middle-class children will be able to swim and the rest won't.

## 2.3. Petitions Committee

The Committee previously considered a [petition](#) calling for:

...the Senedd and Welsh Government to recognise the vulnerability of swimming pools by providing a ring-fenced package of financial aid

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above and beyond the Final Local Government Settlement to ensure swimming pools remain open.

The Committee considered the petition on 27 February 2023. It noted that, whilst it's disappointing that funding will not be ring-fenced for leisure centres, the petitioner found a recent meeting with the Minister helpful and will now focus their ongoing campaign with the UK Government. In light of this Members agreed to close the petition and thanked the petitioner for highlighting this important issue.

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.