

Tess White MSP submission of 7 June 2023

PE2018/C: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

I am writing to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to express my support for PE2018 on recognising the value of swimming pools, and I commend Scottish Swimming as the petitioners for pursuing this issue.

In my region, Bucksburn swimming pool in Aberdeen closed at the end of April this year because of budget cuts to Sports Aberdeen by Aberdeen City Council.

The local community rallied together to try to save the pool, and the strength of feeling from residents demonstrated the tremendous value the facility has provided for Bucksburn and the surrounding area over many years. Thousands of people signed a petition to keep the pool open. I also met with the Save Bucksburn Swimming Pool campaign who fought passionately against the closure and were heartbroken to see the facility's doors close for the final time.

No thought was given to the negative impact the decision to close the pool would have on the mental and physical health of the adults and children who accessed the facility. It was the only swimming pool in the city with a shallow stair entry for people with disabilities, with the next closest swimming pool being two buses away. Bucksburn Amateur Swimming used the facility for more than 25 years, while the additional support needs department at Bucksburn Academy used it twice a week. Nine hundred children used the pool on a weekly basis.

I understand that the costs of keeping pools open are higher than they have been in the past. That is why the UK Government announced a £63m fund for struggling swimming pools in March 2023. The Scottish Government received Barnett Consequentials as a result of this announcement and advised that it is the responsibility of Scottish Ministers to decide how this money is spent.

However, there is still no clarity on the allocation of this funding, with the former Cabinet Secretary for Finance, John Swinney, incorrectly informing the Scottish Parliament on 31 May that he had distributed the

money as part of the block grant in December 2022. He later issued an apology.

The reality is that there is money available to help keep Scotland's swimming pools open. The social, emotional, and health-related value of our swimming pools for local communities cannot be ignored, and I urge the Scottish Government to act to save facilities like Bucksburn swimming pool.