

# Liz Smith MSP submission of 8 March 2024

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

I am writing in support of the above petition, and I do so following extensive engagement with Scottish Swimming, with Olympic swimmer Hannah Miley MBE, and also as the long-serving Convenor of the Cross Party Group on Sport.

As you know, several swimming pools across Scotland have already closed and many more are under threat as a result of the funding constraints placed upon local government. Notwithstanding some encouraging developments in Blairgowrie, Cowdenbeath and Jedburgh, several communities will soon be without a pool altogether. Likewise, in other communities, there will be restricted access to pools because of reduced opening hours.

As someone who has been involved with sport throughout my life, I cannot stress enough how important physical exercise is in relation to our wellbeing. Swimming is one of the most important. It is a life skill which builds resilience, self-esteem and confidence and, as several important studies show, it also boosts educational attainment in children. It brings focus to their lives and, as Hannah Miley has stressed, it brings particularly beneficial effects to those in our more disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

As well as this, swimming pools and their amenities are important social assets. They provide a hub for both families and communities and, in many cases, for competitions at both elite and grassroots level.

In Scotland, we are privileged to live in a land of outstanding landscapes which include our many lochs and rivers and remote beaches. Not surprisingly, there is increasing demand from the public to enjoy these landscapes but they have to be able to do so safely. Sadly, recent statistics show an increase in the numbers of people getting into difficulty in Scotland's waters (the number of fatalities has also risen) and therefore it is imperative that as many people as possible can learn to swim.

I speak for many people when I assert that the loss of swimming pools would bring significant detriment to Scotland. At the very time when the Scottish Government and all political parties are seeking ways to address Scotland's poor health record, the closure of swimming pools would undermine the policies to improve health and wellbeing and bring untold damage to our communities.

I urge the Committee to support petition PE2018 in whatever way it can.