

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

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport written submission, 22 April 2024

Thank you for your letter and request for further information regarding the above petition.

The Scottish Government is aware of the value of swimming and the important role it plays in our society. I recently met with Scottish Swimming to discuss the Future of Swimming Facilities in Scotland report.

Scottish Swimming's recently published documents: 'The Future of Swimming Facilities in Scotland' and 'A Sustainable Future: Enhancing Energy Efficiency in Scotland's Swimming Pools' have provided important information about swimming pools, highlighting the need for an accessible and sustainable estate that is focussed on the needs of communities.

I look forward to phase three of the project, when work with pilot local authority areas will take place to implement the guidance developed in the reports.

The outcome of the project will help to ensure that any investment, particularly at a time when public finances are under so much pressure, ensures sustainable facilities, in the right places, to serve their local communities' needs.

The Scottish Government is aware of the pool closures highlighted in the submission of 07 March 2024. I (and my officials) regularly engage with Community Leisure UK and sportscotland to discuss the local public facilities landscape.

The Scottish Government recognises the financial challenges that local government are currently facing and that difficult decisions were, and continue to be, required in all public services as a result of continued UK Government austerity measures. Despite a real terms cut in the Scottish Budget, the Local Government settlement's share of the discretionary Scottish Budget has increased, highlighting the importance the Scottish Government places on our local services.

The 2024-25 budget includes record funding of more than £14 billion for local government, a real-terms increase of 2.5% compared with 2023-24, including £147 million to enable local authorities to freeze Council Tax rates at their current levels.

With regard to the consequential received as part of the UK Government's Swimming Pool Fund, I can confirm that as per the parliamentary question you referenced, the funding received was included within the Scottish Government's Autumn Budget Revision published on 28 September 2023.

It also formed part of the consequential figures included in the Deputy First Minister's letter to the FPAC on 21 November, providing an update on the in-year budget changes.

This funding was utilised to support the range of measures outlined within the Autumn Budget Revision, including £264.5 million being provided to Local Government for pay offers, £30 million for additional costs relating to the Ukrainian Resettlement programme, and £50 million of additional capital funding being provided to the NHS.

As you have noted, it is for locally elected representatives to make decisions on how best to deliver services to their local communities, including how to allocate the total financial resources available to them, including on leisure facilities, on the basis of local needs and priorities.

Kind regards,

MAREE TODD MSP
Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport