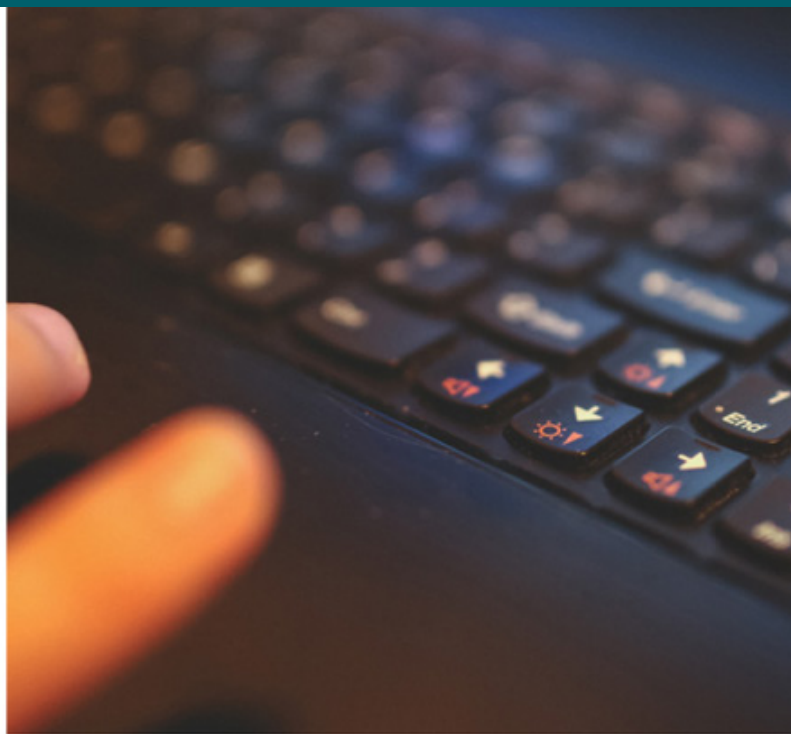


# Local Authority Leisure and Library Services

July 2023



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# Local Authority Leisure and Library Services

July 2023



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddHousing](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddHousing)

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Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:  
John Griffiths MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Luke Fletcher MS**  
Plaid Cymru



**Jayne Bryant MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Joel James MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Sam Rowlands MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Carolyn Thomas MS**  
Welsh Labour

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The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry.



**Mabon ap Gwynfor MS**  
Plaid Cymru

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## Chair's foreword

Local authority leisure centres and libraries enrich the lives of communities across Wales. They provide people in the communities that surround them with a place to meet, take time out, expand their knowledge and support their health and wellbeing. They are also a visible link between what residents contribute through their council tax and the services they receive. The true value of such facilities to communities often becomes more apparent when the services are under threat.

For the past decade, councils have found it challenging to maintain their existing local leisure and library services. A sustained period of austerity, diminishing budgets, a global pandemic and more recently, rapid inflation and unprecedented increases in energy costs have forced councils to reassess their service provision. Leisure and library services have often felt some of the steepest cuts to budgets and changes to the offering, especially as public leisure services are provided on a discretionary basis. We considered whether there is a need to strengthen statutory and policy frameworks to protect these vital services, including developing stronger links with health and wellbeing services.

In an attempt to sustain their leisure and library services whilst simultaneously reducing spending, many councils have sought to deliver these services differently. Examples include establishing local authority trading companies, contracting the management to not-for-profit social enterprises or by transferring assets to community groups. Our inquiry explored the various delivery models in use and their advantages and disadvantages. A further development we examined is the increasing co-location of some services into community 'hubs', in part to save on costs, but also to improve accessibility to the broad range of services offered.

We heard about the financial and operational challenges currently facing local authorities to maintain leisure and library services. Rising energy costs have had a significant impact on leisure facilities in particular, especially those with swimming pools. There is an urgent need for immediate additional support to help them navigate the current crisis, but there is also a need for substantial investment in the decarbonisation and modernisation of leisure and library facilities. We have ageing buildings across Wales which are difficult to decarbonise and a real lack of capital investment. Our leisure and library services need to be fit for the future, so that those wider social benefits raised during the course our inquiry can be achieved.

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I would like to thank all those who contributed to our report.

**John Griffiths MS**

Chair,  
Local Government and Housing Committee



## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the Welsh Government explores whether it should strengthen the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to protect libraries from closure. ....Page 21

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Welsh Government proceeds with its work on the Welsh Public Library Standards framework as a matter of urgency and that it updates the Committee on the timescales for introduction of the framework. ....Page 22

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on progress in developing a new Culture Strategy for Wales and provides clarification on how the strategy will dovetail with the library standards framework. It should also clarify arrangements for collaborative working and streamlining Ministerial responsibilities in relation to library services and culture. ....Page 22

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should review the effectiveness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in ensuring the provision of public leisure services in Wales. It should share its findings with the Committee. ....Page 32

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Welsh Government leads a rapid review of the current state of public leisure provision in Wales and works in partnership with key partners such as the WLGA, One Voice Wales, Sport Wales and the WCVA to consider improvements for the future of leisure services. ....Page 32

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should take all reasonable steps to develop stronger links between public leisure and health services. This should include developing a new policy framework for public leisure, which closely links with health and wellbeing services. As part of the process, the role of Public Services Boards and Regional Partnership Boards in improving joint working between health and public leisure services should also be reviewed.....Page 33

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities via the WLGA to provide support, guidance and share best practice relating to different models of service delivery..... Page 49

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, in collaboration with local government partners, undertakes regular analysis and

publication of Wales specific data on the social value return on investment in delivery of both leisure and library services.....Page 57

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should explore the options for establishing a Libraries Taskforce to promote the value of libraries and the contribution they make to their communities and wider societal benefits..... Page 58

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, with local government partners, monitors and evaluates the efficiency and effectiveness of co-location in Wales to date and shares these findings with local authorities. .... Page 64

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities via the WLGA to ensure that transport, including community transport services, is a key consideration in decision-making on the co-location of services..... Page 64

**Recommendation 12.** We recommend that the Welsh Government allocates the £3.5 million in consequential funding to swimming pools, especially those which may be unviable without additional support. The Welsh Government should update the Committee when a decision about the allocation of the additional £3.5 million has been made.....Page 72

**Recommendation 13.** We endorse the recommendation of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee that the Welsh Government should 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. ....Page 72

**Recommendation 14.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on what additional financial support it will provide leisure and library services to deal with the current energy and cost-of-living crises. ....Page 73

**Recommendation 15.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on progress to develop a strategy to encourage primary schools to provide free swimming lessons, and how it is working with leisure providers on this strategy. ....Page 73

**Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government explores how it can raise awareness of the support for decarbonisation of leisure and library facilities..... Page 78

**Recommendation 17.** We recommend that the Welsh Government invests in supporting the decarbonisation and refurbishment of leisure and library facilities across Wales. This should include shorter-term solutions, as well a long-term strategy, to help local authorities and delivery providers improve the energy efficiency of their facilities as a matter of urgency. .... Page 79

# 1. Introduction

## Background

**1.** Public libraries and leisure centres provide people with a place to meet, work, learn and support physical and mental health. However, over the past decade, local authority spending on leisure and library services has reduced significantly. In an attempt to sustain these services whilst simultaneously reducing spending, several authorities have transferred responsibility for running some of their services to community councils, voluntary groups and social enterprises. Some facilities during that time have closed, while others have been consolidated to form larger one-stop shops providing additional services, such as housing support or money advice.

**2.** There are numerous models in use by local authorities to deliver their leisure and library services. These include, but are not limited to, providing services solely “in house”, through partnership arrangements, through local authority trading companies, contracting management to not-for-profit organisations or transferring assets to community groups.

## Our inquiry

**3.** At our strategic planning session on 20 October 2022, we identified the deliverability and sustainability of local government services as a priority area for the Committee. The following December, we decided to launch an inquiry looking specifically at local authority leisure and library services, and in January 2023 we agreed the following terms of reference:

- The current state of local authority leisure and library service provision;
- The financial and operational challenges facing local authorities to maintain these vital community services;
- Local authority arrangements and exit strategies where alternative delivery models utilised are unsuccessful;
- How the provision of other services provided by local authorities interact with leisure and library services;
- How local authorities use alternative models of service delivery in Wales, and the perceived benefits associated with them; and

- Good practice to ensure sustainability of local leisure and library services for future generations.

## **Consultation**

4. We launched a call for written evidence on 3 February. The consultation received 12 responses, and closed on 13 March 2023. All consultation responses have been published.

## **Engagement**

5. We visited a number of leisure centres and libraries as part of our inquiry. On 16 March, Members visited the following services:

### **Deeside Leisure Centre**

6. Since September 2017, Aura Wales, a Community Benefit Society (owned by the Council employees) has been responsible for managing most of Flintshire Council's leisure, library and heritage services. Deeside Leisure Centre is one of four Flintshire leisure centres run by Aura, but is the only leisure centre without a swimming pool. However, the leisure complex has an array of facilities, including an ice rink, skate park, 3G and grass sports pitches, fitness suites, a Spa and sports hall.

### **Plas Madoc Leisure Centre**

7. Freedom Leisure is responsible for managing all of Wrexham County Borough Council's leisure facilities, with the exception of Plas Madoc. The leisure centre is located on a housing estate in one of the most deprived areas in Wales. Splash Community Trust manage the running of Plas Madoc Leisure Centre. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation and was set up following Wrexham Council's decision to close the leisure centre in 2014 in order to make savings. It was due to be demolished by the council, however, it was reopened later that year after the community trust was formed to take it on. The local authority still own the building, and currently lease the building to the trust.

### **Gresford and District Community Library**

8. In January 2014, Wrexham County Borough Council announced that it would be closing a number of community facilities in a bid to make savings, including Gresford library. The communities of Gresford, Marford and Rossett decided to establish a company limited by guarantee and registered charity to protect the library from closure and sustain its services. The Gresford and District Library,

under its community ownership, opened its doors on 6 May 2014. It is managed and staffed entirely by volunteers.

### **Neath Leisure Centre**

**9.** Neath Leisure Centre is a brand new multi-million pound leisure complex in the centre of Neath. It features a 25m swimming pool, 100 station gym, a health suite, retail floorspace, childcare facilities, a café and library. It was built by Neath Port Talbot Council, and part funded by the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Fund. The local authority entered into a contract with Celtic Leisure, a registered charity, in 2003 to run its leisure facilities. However, control of leisure services in Neath Port Talbot will soon be transferred back to the council following a vote by councillors.

### **Sarn Library**

**10.** Sarn Library is one of 11 libraries serving the residents of the County Borough Council of Bridgend. It is one of six "full-time" libraries run by Awen Cultural Trust in partnership with Bridgend County Borough Council. Awen Cultural Trust is a registered charity, governed by a Board of Trustees. It currently works across three authority areas (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda Cynon Taf).

### **Newport Live**

**11.** Newport Live is a registered charitable trust and company limited by guarantee which runs seven sports and leisure venues across Newport. Established in April 2015, it has a number of gyms, four swimming pools, a tennis centre and other sporting facilities. It also has a regional theatre and arts centre called The Riverfront. Newport Live is governed by a board of trustees and is operated on behalf of Newport City Council.

## **Formal evidence gathering**

**12.** We heard from six panels of witnesses between 23 March and 4 May 2023, before taking evidence from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism ("the Deputy Minister") on 24 May.

## 2. Statutory and policy framework - Libraries

### Public Libraries and Museums Act

**13.** There are a myriad of statutory requirements and duties placed on councils, encompassing key service areas such as local education provision, adult social care and children’s services, transport, highways and planning among many others. Among the statutory requirements on councils is a duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service” for everyone wishing to make use of the facility. It also requires councils to ensure adequate stock and availability of books and encourage “full use of the library service”. However, the Act does not define what a “comprehensive and efficient library service” is, leaving some scope for interpretation by councils.

**14.** In written evidence, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (“CILIP”) said of the Act that it:

*“...rightly makes librarians proud of their sector and offers wider library stakeholders...a solid base from which to defend library services from cuts and diminishing standards of service.*

*The Act and its guarantee to provide library services across Wales offers the Welsh Government a network of consistent service delivery at the heart of local authorities.”<sup>1</sup>*

**15.** GLL (Better) told us that the problem with the 1964 Act is the use of the words “comprehensive and efficient”:

*“...it is how those words are defined. So, they are defined locally, and that places library services at risk. I think there would be merit in looking at the situation to see whether further protection could be built in .... So, there may be some merit in looking to see whether additional legislation would be helpful to make sure that the services that you value are retained.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.09.CILIP](#)

<sup>2</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 130

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**16.** According to UNISON Wales, the statutory duty to provide library services needs to be “more specific” as the duty could be interpreted as needing to provide just one library.<sup>3</sup>

**17.** CILIP told us that the 1964 Act:

*“...does a lot of heavy lifting across the UK, and it's useful for people to rally around when there are cuts threatened. But it doesn't do an awful lot. It's really important in a public sense and it's really important that it's there as a starting point, but it's up to us as stakeholders—that's SCL, that's the national library, it's the Government, it's organisations like CILIP—to then decide what that means for us today, now, and how we're going to implement that.”<sup>4</sup>*

**18.** The Deputy Minister confirmed in oral evidence that no Welsh Ministers have used statutory powers under the 1964 Act to intervene and call a local inquiry when a library authority fails to provide the required service:

*“That's not to say that there haven't been discussions with local authorities over the years about the level of their public library services, and, generally, that's been sufficient in terms of being able to resolve any difficulties, and that's the route that we would prefer to go down.”<sup>5</sup>*

**19.** According to the Deputy Minister, strengthening the legislation “would tie it down too tightly and make the library services rather more inflexible.” She went on to say:

*“the library services we would want to be delivering are based on the needs of a particular community, the local authorities are best placed to make that decision. So, we would see legislation as actually being more restrictive rather than kind of freeing it up and giving more clarity.”<sup>6</sup>*

**20.** This was confirmed by the Minister for Finance and Local Government in a letter to us dated 6 June 2023:

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<sup>3</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.06.UNISON.Wales](#)

<sup>4</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 212

<sup>5</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 13

<sup>6</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 15

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*“Library services vary in nature across Wales, and it is the responsibility of individual local authorities to determine the arrangements for the delivery of their library service, taking into account the need of their local communities. It would not be appropriate for the Welsh Government to constrain the ability of a local authority to deliver a service based on local needs.*

*A more closely defined description of a library service, enshrined in legislation, may impede the ability of local authorities to develop and innovate...This flexibility is the reason I have not considered linking the policy framework to the legislation.”<sup>7</sup>*

## **Welsh Public Library Standards**

**21.** While the ultimate responsibility for the provision of local leisure and library services lies with local authorities, duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 require Welsh Ministers to:

*“superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred upon them as library authorities under this Act.”*

**22.** Since 2002, the Welsh Government has fulfilled this duty through the Welsh Public Library Standards (“the standards”) which set out their expectations on local authorities in terms of their library provision. These frameworks were refreshed every three years. According to the Minister for Finance and Local Government:

*“this approach has allowed us to monitor the level of provision, and also to support and encourage the development of new services in libraries.”<sup>8</sup>*

**23.** In 2017, the Welsh Government published its sixth framework - **Connected and Ambitious Libraries**. This framework expired in 2020, with the intention to roll it over for a further year to enable a review and development of a new framework. However, the pandemic disrupted this work.

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<sup>7</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 15 June 2023, [Paper.10](#)

<sup>8</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 15 June 2023, [Paper.10](#)

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**24.** CILIP stated in written evidence that the standards have “put us in a strong position to promote and measure professional standards” and that they should be seen as “a route to ensure service delivery, professionalism and equity of service”.<sup>9</sup>

**25.** GLL (Better) highlighted that the standards have been “helpful” but have “not prevented the erosion of funding from, say, book stocks across Wales.”<sup>10</sup>

**26.** Similarly, Awen Cultural Trust said that the standards have contributed to making sure that the 1964 Act has “greater definition” despite not preventing libraries from closure:

*“...certainly speaking in Wales—and I think it’s been done better here than perhaps elsewhere in the UK—it has protected the library services. It doesn’t mean that libraries haven’t shut, but I do think that they’ve provided a framework whereby local authorities can be measured on their efforts and on their intentions around library services.”*<sup>11</sup>

**27.** However the lack of new and updated standards was an area of concern for Awen Cultural Trust and other stakeholders. CILIP told us that the lack of updated standards meant they were “currently limping along a little bit in the sixth framework”.<sup>12</sup>

**28.** We heard calls for a “complete review”<sup>13</sup> and “whole revamp”<sup>14</sup> of the standards. According to Awen, the standards are “too input-output focused rather than actually looking at delivering best value and the social value”.<sup>15</sup>

*“I guess a question for Government is, ‘Why are you asking those questions? What are you doing with the information? Why does it matter how much is actually being spent? Should it be more the results of that expenditure?’ Because somebody could be spending millions on their library service; it doesn’t necessarily*

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<sup>9</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.09.CILIP](#)

<sup>10</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 130

<sup>11</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 123

<sup>12</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 180

<sup>13</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 220

<sup>14</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 125

<sup>15</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 125

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*mean it's a good library service. So, I think it's really asking those deep questions as to why we want this information.*"<sup>16</sup>

**29.** The Welsh Local Government Association ("WLGA") said that it was timely for the framework to be reviewed considering the services libraries now offer "with all the digital elements plus more".<sup>17</sup> Collaboration with key stakeholders, including Welsh Government is key it said, with Cllr. Rob Stewart stating that local government is keen to take the "opportunity to discuss, improve, co-produce, redesign" the framework. This model of working, he noted, is better than using the "very blunt and ineffective stick of legislation".<sup>18</sup>

**30.** In terms of what the new standards should look like, Community Leisure UK Wales told us that "it's important that there's not a one-size-fits-all offer":

*"There are some examples, we believe, of where the standards framework has ensured consistency. One example is free Wi-Fi across Welsh libraries—and there's the question: would it have been possible without that standards framework and the core entitlement? But one of the cautions that we would argue for is, obviously, every community is different and every community has different needs as well, so if it's about equity of access, it's important that there's not a one-size-fits-all offer."*<sup>19</sup>

**31.** Similarly, Awen Cultural Trusts said:

*"...libraries are now very vibrant spaces; they're very different wherever you go, they're very localised, and I think whatever framework we have in place needs to reflect that, and that they mean a great deal of different things to many, many different people."*<sup>20</sup>

**32.** We heard that for older people in particular, it is important that the role of libraries in supporting digital skills development is maintained. According to the Older People's Commissioner for Wales:

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<sup>16</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 143

<sup>17</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 378

<sup>18</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 383

<sup>19</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 92

<sup>20</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 144

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*“This will enable older people who wish to develop skills to be online to access formal or informal training in a welcoming and familiar environment, helping to improve digital inclusion. However, libraries also act as sources of information and support for those older people who are unable or choose not to access the internet, reducing digital exclusion and this activity is essential.”<sup>21</sup>*

**33.** CILIP called for the standards to be used more effectively to “measure, develop and promote public libraries in Wales via better dissemination and professional discussion”. Its written evidence goes on to state that the standards could also be used to “measure the impact of budgetary cuts to services and to instigate meaningful feedback to local authorities addressing this impact”.<sup>22</sup>

**34.** The Society of Chief Librarians Cymru (“SCL Cymru”) noted the lack of connection between the standards and the 1964 Act. It called for greater clarity around what happens when authorities have fallen below what is considered “acceptable levels” of service provision:

*“...what is missing is the monitoring of performance as it relates to the standards. So, what happens afterwards where, potentially, authorities may have fallen down below what would be seen as acceptable levels? What takes place then? So, that needs to be a bit clearer, I think.*

*And then, on its flip side, where things have gone really, really well, we need to use it as a vehicle to advocate for libraries, so people can understand what they are and what opportunities they present.”<sup>23</sup>*

**35.** We also heard that more could be done in terms of sharing best practice. For example, CILIP told us:

*“I think librarians are obsessed, perhaps quite rightly, with who is not using their services, and that's very difficult to measure. But I think we do need to spend time...thinking about that in the new public library standards and how we do that. There are lots of really interesting cases across individual authorities, and sometimes individual libraries, where people are doing really*

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<sup>21</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.05 Older People's Commissioner for Wales](#)

<sup>22</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.09 CILIP](#)

<sup>23</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraphs 210-211

*interesting work in these areas, but...it's not very strategic at a national level, and we'd really welcome that.*"<sup>24</sup>

**36.** Similarly, Community Leisure UK Wales commented that:

*"...there is great innovation happening across library services in Wales that can be applied in terms of programmes in other local authority areas as well. That isn't necessarily needed to be included in a standards framework, but is just generally in terms of sharing best practice."*<sup>25</sup>

**37.** According to Community Leisure UK Wales members, one thing that is missing from the current framework is a national body to lead public library development in Wales.<sup>26</sup> This was echoed by Awen Cultural Trust who noted that "there isn't a public body that's responsible for libraries."<sup>27</sup> One Voice Wales said that existing networks to share best practice should be extended to include community and town councils.<sup>28</sup>

**38.** The WLGA voiced concerns in written evidence that the library service suffers from a "lack of clear strategy" at Welsh Government level.<sup>29</sup>

**39.** The Deputy Minister told us that "officials began working on the seventh framework over the summer".<sup>30</sup> In terms of the work that Welsh Government officials have been doing with chief librarians on the new framework, it was said:

*"...the nature of libraries is really changing, and we'd like the seventh framework to recognise that change but also to support and develop the kinds of changes that are proving to be so effective in libraries."*<sup>31</sup>

**40.** The Deputy Minister said that her understanding and expectation would be that the review would take account of changes in digital as well as societal needs:

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<sup>24</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 115

<sup>25</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 93

<sup>26</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 98

<sup>27</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 124

<sup>28</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 101

<sup>29</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.11.WLGA](#)

<sup>30</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 26

<sup>31</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 27

*“What we saw was a growth of digital provision through COVID, and I think we saw the benefits of that. It adds a whole new dimension to libraries. We would very much want to see that developed and made more consistent across all of our public libraries, so I would anticipate that being very much part of the seventh framework.”<sup>32</sup>*

**41.** She also told us that “libraries are integral to the considerations for the new culture strategy”, going on to explain that:

*“It will include how the library standards work. So, we've consulted with representatives of the libraries sector, and we're including them in the next phase of developing and reviewing the key themes, and developing the strategy. The strategy covers four areas of culture, and libraries being one of those significant areas. They've all got equal value and equal importance within the strategy, and I'm hoping that that will be published later this year.*

*It's developing the library standards and the culture strategy in tandem. So, again, I don't want to see the two things sitting separately, because the culture strategy clearly needs to inform the library standards as well. So, that's why it's important that we make sure that there is that close relationship between library officials, people working on the culture strategy, and the development of the framework.”<sup>33</sup>*

## **Our view**

**42.** Witnesses were not overwhelmingly for or against legislating for public library provision in Wales, although some noted that despite a distinctive framework in Wales, it has not prevented the erosion of funding or prevented closures. We therefore agree with witnesses that there is merit in looking at whether further protection could be built into the existing framework to help protect libraries from further closures. After all, libraries are community hubs, which support a wide variety of services and activities, not just the ability to borrow books.

**43.** Although there may be room to strengthen the legislation to prevent libraries from closures, we believe that the library services being delivered should be based

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<sup>32</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 29

<sup>33</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraphs 31-32

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on the need of a community and that local authorities are best placed to make decisions around the delivery of their library service. We were not persuaded of the merits of enshrining a more prescriptive definition of a library service in legislation, especially when this could impede the ability of local authorities and delivery partners to develop their provision and to innovate. We heard about, and saw for ourselves, the innovative work taking place in libraries across Wales to engage with communities, and we would not wish to see this diminishing in any way. However, any future strengthening of the legislation to prevent libraries from closure should take into account that “a library service” today is very different to what it was in 1964 when the Act was introduced.

**44.** We note that the Welsh Government has no plans to strengthen the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. However, we would urge it to rethink this decision and give further consideration to whether the statutory framework should be strengthened.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the Welsh Government explores whether it should strengthen the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to protect libraries from closure.

**45.** Given recent developments and innovation in library services in Wales, driven in part as a consequence of the pandemic and cost-of-living challenges, we are concerned about the lack of a new and updated Welsh Public Library Standards framework. We heard calls for a complete revamp of the standards to reflect the services libraries now deliver and digital advancements. With the significant time that has lapsed since the last iteration, we sincerely hope that the seventh framework will not be largely based on the existing framework. In terms of what the new standards should provide, we believe that they should allow for flexibility. We agree with witnesses that a one-size-fits-all offer would be unsuitable to allow for differences by area and the needs of local communities. We would also like to see opportunities for sharing best practice built into the framework. There is important and effective work happening across libraries in Wales, and encouraging best practice sharing via the framework would help local authorities deliver their services in innovative ways, whilst making best use of the resources available.

**46.** We heard calls for a greater link between the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Welsh Public Library Standards, and greater clarity around what happens when authorities fall below what are considered “acceptable levels” of service provision. We note however that the Minister for Finance and Local Government has opted not to consider linking the policy framework to the legislation. This, the Minister states, is to enable local authorities to maintain their

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flexibility in terms of the level and type of library services they provide. However, we would encourage any performance and quality indicators in the new iteration of the standards to be reflective of the digital revolution and the transformation in the delivery of library services in recent years.

**47.** We heard from the Minister that libraries are “integral to the considerations for the new culture strategy” and that both the strategy and the seventh library standards are being developed in tandem. We strongly endorse this approach, ensuring such work is not undertaken in silos. In our view, this is especially important as we are concerned that leisure and library services are often overlooked or undervalued within the wider context of public service provision. We would therefore strongly encourage joined up working to reshape the way library services are provided. However, we note that the Minister for Finance and Local Government has responsibility for public libraries, and that the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism is responsible for the development of the new culture strategy. We are concerned that, as a result, issues relating to public libraries may not be a priority or a regular agenda item at Ministerial meetings. We would therefore be grateful if the Welsh Government could provide clarity on responsibilities and the approach being taken by Ministers and officials to work collaboratively and effectively on the culture strategy and the new library standards.

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Welsh Government proceeds with its work on the Welsh Public Library Standards framework as a matter of urgency and that it updates the Committee on the timescales for introduction of the framework.

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on progress in developing a new Culture Strategy for Wales and provides clarification on how the strategy will dovetail with the library standards framework. It should also clarify arrangements for collaborative working and streamlining Ministerial responsibilities in relation to library services and culture.



## 3. Statutory and policy framework – Leisure

### Legislation

**48.** While there are long-standing duties on councils to provide library services to residents, the same does not apply to leisure services. There is no law which requires councils to provide leisure services to their residents, which are instead provided on a discretionary basis.

**49.** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 does require public bodies in Wales, including councils, to consider the long-term impact of their policy and budgetary decisions. The Act established seven well-being goals to ensure all are working towards the same purpose and reinforces the importance of leisure and recreation provision in Wales. Among the seven well-being goals that public bodies must work towards achieving that are relevant to leisure and library provision are:

- A healthier Wales - a society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
- A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language - a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

**50.** The Welsh Sports Association (“WSA”) in their written evidence noted that “as leisure is not a statutory service, it has been one of the first budget areas to come under pressure as finances are squeezed.”<sup>34</sup>

**51.** Similarly, we heard from Cwmpas that in periods of financial difficulty, non-statutory services, will be the first to feel the impact when difficult decisions must be made, therefore it is worth considering whether leisure services should be placed on a statutory footing:

*“...if we go back to 2010, the debates were that, actually, this isn't statutory—obviously, social services is statutory, education is statutory—and when the public sector had to make some difficult decisions, some of the first decisions were based around this agenda. If you think of us in Wales, we are a nation*

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<sup>34</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07 Welsh Sports Association](#)

*that created the well-being of future generations Act, and if we all agree on the whole well-being part of this and the prevention part of this work that we do, then maybe it does need to be on the same, similar statutory footing.”<sup>35</sup>*

**52.** GLL (Better) said that it would welcome:

*“simple legislation, saying that there needs to be a health and leisure strategy that ensures that the leisure centre service joins up with the health service would be good.”<sup>36</sup>*

**53.** WSA agreed that there is a need to “explore the options” for legislating. However, it noted existing legislation in the form of the Well-being of Future Generations Act which has “helped crystallise the position of delivery of public leisure”, but is unsure whether it goes far enough<sup>37</sup>. In its written evidence, WSA recommended:

*“Strengthening existing duties in the Future Generations Act and ensuring ongoing delivery of accessible, affordable local services in Welsh communities.”<sup>38</sup>*

**54.** Similarly, Swim Wales, who stated that the idea of legislating would be a particularly “strong response”, also referenced the Well-being of Future Generations Act:

*“I think the framework is there across the well-being of future generations Act...I think there’s a very strong will across Wales, across all of our partners to do this...I’d like to think that the will and the overall strategy and ambition for Wales would override any need to legislate. But, clearly, if that’s not happening, then, we run out of alternatives.”<sup>39</sup>*

**55.** Community Leisure UK Wales questioned the purpose of legislating for public leisure, stating “as we can see with library services, it [the 1964 Act] doesn’t

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<sup>35</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 68

<sup>36</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 135

<sup>37</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 217

<sup>38</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07.Welsh Sports Association](#)

<sup>39</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 218

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protect them from closures”. Community Leisure UK Wales also believed that the Well-being of Future Generations Act:

*“provides some statutory protection for leisure and library services, because the associated well-being goals play a significant role, actually, in safeguarding leisure and library services in Wales.”<sup>40</sup>*

**56.** According to Sport Wales, regardless of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the decision to keep facilities open, or at reduced hours, will come down to the perceived benefits of doing so against the bottom line.<sup>41</sup> However, it noted that the Act has helped “to significantly broaden the perspective of what that bottom line is”:

*“I think that we have all come to the nature of it being a bit of a false economy to cut back on leisure services and library services. Ultimately, that's going to have a knock-on effect on education, health, social services, et cetera, in the longer term, which will potentially be more expensive to the public purse if we're having to deal with the impacts of not providing those benefits. But I think the Act is there, at the moment, more as a carrot than a stick, and I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. It is about using the Act to empower social change and to think broadly and long term about these things. But, ultimately, I don't think, if we're being really honest about it, that people are making determined decisions to keep things open, or at a certain level of service, based entirely on the future generations Act.”<sup>42</sup>*

**57.** UNISON Wales was clear on what it thought the priority should be, noting that “if councils had sufficient funding... we wouldn't be necessarily looking to see whether we need to legislate to bring councils into order around this”:<sup>43</sup>

*“...it is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation; I think the lack of funding has meant that we've got a disparagement and a completely varied provision in terms of quality and quantity. So,*

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<sup>40</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 75

<sup>41</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 79

<sup>42</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 80

<sup>43</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 276

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*essentially, it's, 'How can we get consistency clearly?' Well, I think we get consistency by improving funding to local government. But I think there is a role for clarification and tightening up on legislation. But I'm not one who supports over-prescriptiveness for councils, because I believe councils are responsible to their communities, and within a framework, they work well if properly and adequately funded."*<sup>44</sup>

**58.** Aura Wales also highlighted the need for sufficient funding:

*"Legislation may help...But what would be incredibly helpful in future, because we have received support from Welsh Government via local authority, is, if funds were made available for leisure services in particular, that, when they get passed on to local authorities, they're ring-fenced in some way so that, when there are difficult financial pressures for local authorities, that actually helps protect some of the support."*<sup>45</sup>

**59.** The WLGA also stated that this is a finance issue. Cllr. Rob Stewart hoped legislation would not be necessary, stating:

*"You can have all the legislation you want, but the funding needs to be provided, and that's the bottom line in all of this. Otherwise, you will leave local authorities with the unenviable task of diverting resources from education or social care to meet their legislative requirements."*<sup>46</sup>

**60.** Cllr. Carwyn Jones went on to say that:

*"We shouldn't spend time or resources making legislation in these areas, because these areas are so important to residents across Wales, so the most important thing that we can do is get together in partnership to see what the strategy and policy is for the future, so that we can improve the estate and the provision over the next 10, 20 or 30 years."*<sup>47</sup>

**61.** The Deputy Minister's evidence paper notes the concerns within the leisure sector that the challenging financial environment for local authorities "may result

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<sup>44</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 277

<sup>45</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 137

<sup>46</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 374

<sup>47</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 376

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in a reduction or rationalisation of services over the coming years”. The paper does reflect on the fact that “leisure services are not protected as a statutory service in the same way as library services”, but does not address the possibility of legislating in this area.<sup>48</sup>

**62.** In oral evidence, the Deputy Minister told us that legislating for the provision of library services would probably outweigh the perceived benefits. She explained:

*“...this is an area of public service provision that is best determined by the local authority in terms of what the needs of their communities are. So, local authorities will consider what leisure services they provide in accordance with the requirements of the well-being of future generations Act, and I wouldn't want a further layer of legislation to sit either above that or between that that restricts what local authorities do.”<sup>49</sup>*

## Policy framework

**63.** There is no duty on Welsh Ministers to have oversight and promote improvements in public leisure services at present, although the Welsh Government does have several strategies to **encourage greater participation in sport and active recreation more generally.**

**64.** GLL (Better) told us that it would like to see duties placed on national and local government to publish a health and leisure strategy to ensure that the leisure centre service joins up with the health service. GLL continued by stating:

*“It would be helpful if local authorities were forced to have a coherent leisure strategy... I think that would give clarity to everybody, including our colleagues in the health service, so people knew what to expect for a universal leisure service.”<sup>50</sup>*

**65.** The Older People’s Commissioner for Wales told us that “being able to keep active is crucial in enabling everyone to age well”.<sup>51</sup>

**66.** In their written evidence, WSA called for “enhanced cross Government working to support public leisure services”.<sup>52</sup> According to WSA, one of the current

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<sup>48</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper 5](#)

<sup>49</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 20

<sup>50</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 132

<sup>51</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.05 Older People’s Commissioner for Wales](#)

<sup>52</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07 Welsh Sports Association](#)

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challenges is “that sport’s place around some of the decision-making tables isn’t clear”:

*“...for example, in the public services boards, there isn't necessarily always a place for sport, and that may change now that Sport Wales is beginning to roll out the regional partnership model. I think that's one of the key areas of alignment that could happen. Sport's role and voice in, for example, the national exercise referral system has been tricky, and the level of subsidy that is provided to the national exercise referral system has been unchanged for the better part of a decade now. That's made delivery of it increasingly challenging. I think all of that comes back to how sport doesn't always have access to the decision makers in the right places, in education policy, in health policy...”<sup>53</sup>*

**67.** In its written evidence, WSA recommended that:

*“The key role of leisure services in delivering against our mix of priorities in sport, public health and community wellbeing should allow for a clear and defined place for physical activity in Governance and decision making within public service boards, Local Authority cabinets, the Welsh Government etc.”<sup>54</sup>*

**68.** Sport Wales explained that it is implementing a flagship programme relating to its work with and investment of local authority sport delivery:

*“The Regional Sport Partnership (RSP) model is a key element of encouraging greater collaboration of resources, expertise and opportunities among public bodies and partners in a local area.*

*Sport Wales is facilitating, through RSPs, partnerships that extend beyond traditional sport providers. This means bringing different local authority services together with sport and leisure, but also different partners including universities, housing associations, third sector charities, National Governing Bodies of Sport and others who can enhance and accelerate change in the sporting offer.*

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<sup>53</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 227

<sup>54</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07.Welsh Sports Association](#)

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*This change has been brought about by aligning with Welsh Government regional working policies and a desire to support opportunities which can address the stubborn inequalities in participation among different sections of the community. It is also a recognition that local authorities have myriad requirements delivering vital services to their populations, and with smart working across public bodies, charities, and enterprises delivering leisure, sport and physical activity offerings across an area should become more sustainable.”<sup>55</sup>*

**69.** In December 2022, Sport England published a **report** evaluating the current state of public sport and leisure services in England. According to Community Leisure UK Wales, one of the positives that came from the report “is that Sport England quite clearly stated an intention for public leisure to become an active well-being service, and to be recognised as such.” They went on to say:

*“...I think that is something that would be very welcomed by public leisure operators, to have that collective commitment to say, 'Actually, public leisure is more than sport, physical activity; leisure is actually there for health and well-being.’”<sup>56</sup>*

**70.** One Voice Wales told us that they would want to contribute to a review of leisure services and that:

*“...it's a conversation to be had between the WLGA, One Voice Wales and the WCVA, as to how this could be possibly taken forward in collaboration with Welsh Government.”<sup>57</sup>*

**71.** Sport Wales felt that the WLGA would be the most appropriate body to carry out a review.<sup>58</sup> Whereas the WLGA felt that the Welsh Government should lead on any such review, in partnership with others. Cllr Carwyn Jones listed:

*“Sport Wales, the WLGA, the authorities, the big players, the FAW, all the stakeholders who have a part in this sector. And I*

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<sup>55</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.03.Sport Wales](#)

<sup>56</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 115

<sup>57</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 113

<sup>58</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 107

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*think between us all we would be able to have a vision for the future so that we could plan jointly for the years to come.”<sup>59</sup>*

**72.** Cllr Rob Stewart went on to say:

*“I think the last thing we'd want to do is to have a strategy created in isolation and then provide it without any funds to deliver it. So, I think it's an opportunity for us to work together to do develop something really good.”<sup>60</sup>*

**73.** The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee undertook an inquiry **on Participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas**. The Committee's report notes that despite physical activity being mentioned in policy documents, it is rarely the focus or a key indicator of success. Professor Melitta McNarry elaborated on this point by telling the Committee:

*“We really do need to start joining up policies and having policies that work to address these multiple things, using probably a whole-system approach, and thereby accounting for the fact that not one of those things happens in isolation. So, we can't just take education, we can't just take health and then look to treat them independently; we need to start looking at their intersections and interactions to get the greatest gains in the shortest period of time, and for the best cost-effectiveness, as well.”<sup>61</sup>*

**74.** The Committee concluded with the following recommendation:

*“We recommend that the Welsh Government introduce a new national approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas. This approach should bring together existing work and good practice that is already taking place as well as introduce new ideas to contribute to this approach. This should include measurable targets, set against*

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<sup>59</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 354

<sup>60</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 357

<sup>61</sup> Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, Record of Proceedings, 8 June 2022, paragraph 265

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*a defined time period of five years, to ensure that there is equity in access to participating in sport and physical activity.”<sup>62</sup>*

**75.** The Deputy Minister rejected the recommendation, stating:

*“Sport Wales helped the sector produce a national vision and developed its own strategy for sport in Wales in line with that vision that is supported by other public bodies, such as Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales. This vision is for an active nation where everyone can have a lifelong enjoyment of sport. This was developed following extensive consultation led by Sport Wales following the independent review of Sport Wales commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2017.”<sup>63</sup>*

**76.** When we raised the Deputy Minister’s rejection of the recommendation during our oral evidence session, she explained that she:

*“...didn't want to waste time and resource developing a new strategy when we were already working to a strategy that was engaging with the sector and with stakeholders across local authority, across the third sector, with the general public and across Government. As a result of that vision and that strategy, we've developed things...like the daily mile. We've also talked about the 'Health Weight: Healthy Wales' strategy—all of that came out of that vision that was established by Sport Wales. So, it was really about not reinventing the wheel. We just felt that we were already doing that.”<sup>64</sup>*

## Our view

**77.** Local authority leisure services are provided on a discretionary basis – there is not a statutory or policy framework in place. We heard evidence that there is some merit in exploring options for legislating, but it was argued that if local authorities had sufficient funding, there would be no need for legislation.

<sup>62</sup> Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, [Levelling the playing field: A report on participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas](#) – August 2022

<sup>63</sup> Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, [The Welsh Government’s response to the recommendations in the Senedd’s Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee report “Levelling the playing field: A report on participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas”](#), 28 September 2022

<sup>64</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 46

**78.** A number of stakeholders noted existing legislation in the form of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which has helped protect the provision of public leisure services. However, we heard concerns that the Act may not go far enough.

**79.** We are not convinced that there is currently a need for legislation, but we would encourage the Welsh Government to review the effectiveness of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in ensuring the provision and protection of public leisure services in Wales.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should review the effectiveness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in ensuring the provision of public leisure services in Wales. It should share its findings with the Committee.

**80.** While we are not convinced of the need for legislation at the moment, we do see the benefits of having a policy framework for public leisure provision. We note that the Welsh Government has several strategies to encourage greater participation in sport and active recreation more generally, but there is no apparent national vision for public leisure services, especially one that links health services and public leisure.

**81.** Several witnesses called for a health and leisure strategy to ensure that leisure services join-up with health services. A strategy could be helpful in standardising what is expected of local authorities in terms of leisure provision - it would enable local authorities to plan their provision, and for the public to know what they can expect from their leisure service.

**82.** We were interested to hear about Sport England's report on the current state of public sport and leisure services, which found that public leisure should become an active well-being service and be recognised as such. We believe this is something that would be welcomed in Wales. It should be recognised that public leisure is more than simply sport, but plays a critical role in promoting positive health outcomes, including the prevention and management of physical and mental illnesses. We recommend that the Welsh Government leads a rapid review of public leisure services in Wales and works closely with partners such as the WLGA, One Voice Wales, Sport Wales and the WCVA.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Welsh Government leads a rapid review of the current state of public leisure provision in Wales and works in partnership with key partners such as the WLGA, One Voice Wales, Sport Wales and the WCVA to consider improvements for the future of leisure services.

**83.** We strongly recommend that the Welsh Government introduces a new framework for public leisure services which makes the connections between health and wellbeing services and public leisure. We note that the Deputy Minister rejected the Culture Committee's recommendation for a new national approach for participation in sport and physical activity in disadvantaged areas, on the basis that the Welsh Government already has its own strategy for sport. However, we feel that there is a pressing need to establish stronger links between health and leisure services. This would ensure the voice of public leisure and sport is heard within and across the various regional partnership models in Wales, as well as support better joined-up policies focused on prevention and positive health outcomes.

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should take all reasonable steps to develop stronger links between public leisure and health services. This should include developing a new policy framework for public leisure, which closely links with health and wellbeing services. As part of the process, the role of Public Services Boards and Regional Partnership Boards in improving joint working between health and public leisure services should also be reviewed.

## 4. Delivery models

**84.** Local authorities over the past decade have gradually been transferring the management of their leisure facilities, and to a lesser extent libraries and other cultural facilities, to external partners.

**85.** These partners are often in the form of a trust, a community benefit society, a social enterprise or to the community itself. A little over a decade ago, only a handful of authorities in Wales had opted to move to a different model for running some of their services. However, as austerity increased and council budgets continued to diminish, more authorities decided to contract their leisure services, and sometimes library services, to an external provider.

**86.** Cwmpas noted in its written evidence:

*“When managed effectively in a way that develops these services and facilities as community assets, alternative models of service delivery can provide essential services and create considerable social value.”<sup>65</sup>*

**87.** UNISON Wales on the other hand is opposed to outsourcing. It noted in its written evidence its concerns that councils have “sought to outsource services to make cost savings”, and that “the ‘austerity narrative’ adds a new level of urgency to making short-term financial decisions.” It is worried that a move to reduce costs “at the expense of the workforce” is a way to ‘soften up’ public services for privatisation. It goes on to state that “many people feel that co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises are simply a ‘more acceptable face’ of outsourcing.”<sup>66</sup>

**88.** In oral evidence, UNISON Wales said that “there is no advantage to outsourcing in any form or model”:

*“In terms of the staff experience, our survey has demonstrated that there are no benefits to staff; in fact, quite the opposite. There are lots of detrimental experiences of staff in terms of leisure services, but also library services as well. There's a greater reliance on zero-hours contracts, or under-hours contracts... and moving away from the National Joint Council—that's the national local government terms and conditions and pay... We have attempts to move away from the local government*

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<sup>65</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.04 Cwmpas](#)

<sup>66</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.06 UNISON Wales](#)

*pension scheme. And because these are outsourced, then the council basically says it's nothing to do with them.*"<sup>67</sup>

**89.** Despite enterprises often being owned by its employees, UNISON Wales said that the stake staff have is often "minimal", and that:

*"The engagement with the recognised trade unions, where the membership in those bodies would be the majority of the staff, is poor, and often they set up alternative ways of engaging with the staff to bypass the organised, recognised trade unions."*<sup>68</sup>

**90.** Aura Wales on the other hand said:

*"...we are an employee-owned community benefit society, so, obviously, we, the board, have to talk to our shareholders, which we do regularly, with our employees, but our employees are bought into Aura—they're part of Aura in a much broader way than it's just Aura that employs them."*<sup>69</sup>

**91.** Community Leisure UK Wales told us that despite originally establishing larger trusts for financial savings, "in the last few years, they have become popular because of that social value and being embedded in all parts of the organisations". It also stated that "contracts are renewed with the recognition that, actually, working with a charitable trust model delivers that wider social value to the community":<sup>70</sup>

*"Working with a charitable operator for your leisure and library services actually allows a local authority to then allocate resources and focus on other essential services knowing that their leisure and library services are in good hands and actually will be looked after for the benefit of communities."*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 244

<sup>68</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 284

<sup>69</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 249

<sup>70</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 176

<sup>71</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 177

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**92.** In its written evidence, WSA stated that it is “model agnostic” and that different approaches suit varying local circumstances.<sup>72</sup>

**93.** We heard of some benefits of operating services through a trust or charity, which include potential tax reliefs and access to grants beyond the reach of local authorities. For example, Community Leisure UK Wales said that one of the advantages to a social enterprise running an independent facility is the charitable tax relief that they receive. It described the charitable national non-domestic rate relief of 80 per cent as “quite significant on actually running a facility”.<sup>73</sup>

**94.** Similarly, Cwmpas said:

*“...the advantage in terms of getting the community to step up is setting up a legal structure that allows them to access capital from outside the local authority. That's the one advantage, because as a non-profit distributing company, whether they're defined as a co-operative or a social enterprise, they could develop relationships with third-party funders in doing that.”<sup>74</sup>*

**95.** It went on to say that relying on volunteers can also lead to savings:

*“The other advantage, obviously, is linking that facility back into the community, and the company developing their membership base, so they get members of the company who will become volunteers, who may volunteer within the business, on the board as part of that governance, or may volunteer to be part of the running of the service. So, there's an element of reducing the potential cost of delivering that service.”<sup>75</sup>*

**96.** On volunteers, Aura Wales said that they “bring with them a range of experience” in areas such as “finance, marketing, PR, education, HR and the charities sector, as well as leisure, libraries, play and heritage”.<sup>76</sup> However, Cwmpas did note that good governance can be a challenge when relying on volunteers:

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<sup>72</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07.Welsh Sports Association](#)

<sup>73</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 57

<sup>74</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 53

<sup>75</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 53

<sup>76</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 56

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*“Lots of them come from the starting point of setting up a pressure group to save the facility, and they have a board, and we can support them and train them to develop good governance. But good governance never ends, so, actually, the challenge is when board members, who are volunteers, leave and it's actually how you replace them and how you ensure that they're representative.”<sup>77</sup>*

**97.** UNISON Wales described the budgetary benefit of outsourcing as “illusionary”, stating:

*“...if you're going to be able to give 100 per cent business rate relief to a library service or a leisure service that's outsourced, you should also be able to give 100 per cent business rate relief if you retain it in-house. It shouldn't be an unlevel playing field, which distorts the economics of the situation. It can't be right that you cede democratic control and the ability to adapt a service just because there is a model that provides some financial benefit from doing that without any benefit to the service that is being provided or to the workforce that is providing that service.”<sup>78</sup>*

**98.** Another suggested benefit of being an independent organisation was quicker decision making and action in terms of developing services. Aura Wales described themselves as being “a bit more agile, and that’s not a criticism of local authorities” who have a myriad of responsibilities.<sup>79</sup> Community Leisure UK Wales said:

*“...being a charitable organisation, being an independent organisation, you are quicker in your decision making in terms of where you're going to invest in your facility, in the events that you are going to run and the partnerships that you have with your local community.”<sup>80</sup>*

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<sup>77</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 35

<sup>78</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 246

<sup>79</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 54

<sup>80</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 247

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**99.** For example, Awen Cultural Trust said that it was “agile enough” to change its services during the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.<sup>81</sup> Newport Live told us that it was able to open one of its locations in the city centre to the homeless within 48 hours at the start of the pandemic.

**100.** However, UNISON Wales on the other hand argued that being able to do things quicker, does not necessarily make it better.<sup>82</sup>

*“...there is a track record of alternative providers implementing changes very quickly without any consultation with either the local authority or with the staff that provide those services. In fact, that's one of the criticisms that we put in our report, that the social partnership model that we benefit from in public services is not always translated or taken on board by the outsourced providers.”<sup>83</sup>*

**101.** A common theme in the evidence relating to delivery models was that a partnership approach should be adopted, regardless of the model being used. Community Leisure UK Wales said:

*“...good practice is where local authorities and leisure and culture trusts, or whichever is the operator, adopt a partnership approach, where they co-design, co-develop the service to address common goals.”<sup>84</sup>*

**102.** It went on to say that treating the relationship as a “client-supplier” one, “focusing specifically on low-cost services” has not worked:

*“We work with all of these organisations, and they very much want this to be a partnership approach with the local authority and do not want them to be treated as a client-supplier relationship.”<sup>85</sup>*

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<sup>81</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 104

<sup>82</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, Paragraph 249

<sup>83</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, Paragraph 248

<sup>84</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, Paragraph 123

<sup>85</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, Paragraph 124

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**103.** When we visited Newport Live, we heard that the relationship with Newport Council is critical to its success. Swim Wales also told us that a connection and support network needs to be maintained.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Cwmpas said:

*“If you're going to transfer an asset, then it needs to be that and it needs the support with it. You can't just hand that over to a fledgling community group where we can go in and help them to set up as a charitable incorporated organisation or a community interest company or a community benefit society; you need the ongoing support from the local authority to make that work, because without that ongoing support, it's highly likely that that will fail.”<sup>87</sup>*

**104.** According to Audit Wales, the Auditor General's report on Community Asset Transfers published in 2018, found that there was scope for local authorities to “provide better and more visible help and support before, during, and after the ‘community asset transfer’ process.”<sup>88</sup>

**105.** With regard to social enterprises, the Auditor General for Wales in his report ‘A missed opportunity’ - Social Enterprises found that:

*“Local authorities are mostly not encouraging social enterprises and are not seeking to grow and widen their role and Social Enterprises are often at the fringes of local authority business. As a result, local authorities are missing out on the potential for Social Enterprises to help deliver services that can improve people's quality of life.”<sup>89</sup>*

**106.** For a partnership approach to work, Cwmpas said that there must be a “political realisation” among local government that an element of control in terms of political decision making is lost when you transfer a service:

*“You can't really have your cake and eat it in terms of control, ownership, management...Elected members need to be realistic that, if they're going to do it, it's not just about saving, the bottom line of the 80 per cent mandatory rate relief; it's about giving the model—spinning that model out and giving it the best chance to have the freedom to be entrepreneurial and*

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<sup>86</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, Paragraph 185

<sup>87</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 121

<sup>88</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>89</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

*to make changes, and develop better services for the people in that community, really.”<sup>90</sup>*

**107.** Aura Wales noted that as a charitable, not-for-profit organisation, they “don’t have party obligations” and when making decisions, do not have to worry about what a political party might say or what the political ramifications might be.<sup>91</sup> However, UNISON Wales felt that there is no:

*“...substitute for having accountability for those services, which is democratically accountable through the local councillors, which, as soon as you outsource these facilities, you lose that direct accountability.”<sup>92</sup>*

**108.** Regardless of the delivery model, we heard of the importance of sharing good practice and learnings. UNISON Wales told us that they “hope that councils will learn the lessons from the experiences across councils in Wales and share those experiences”.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Community Leisure UK Wales said that it is important to ensure that:

*“we continue to support and share best practice of alternative models of service delivery, whether it’s the larger trusts, the smaller independent charities or the in-house delivery of local authorities.”<sup>94</sup>*

**109.** In its written evidence, Community Leisure UK Wales cautions local authorities to not make decisions “based solely on cost management” but instead, to “focus on the delivery of leisure and culture as public services”. Ultimately, changing contracts from leisure trusts to another model is “unlikely to support Councils with their budget pressures nor will it increase investment”.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 143

<sup>91</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 57

<sup>92</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, Paragraph 249

<sup>93</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, Paragraph 268

<sup>94</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 182

<sup>95</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.02 Community Leisure Wales](#)

## Delivery of leisure provision

**110.** The majority of councils no longer rely solely on “in-house” operations to deliver services, with a significant shift in how leisure services are delivered in Wales.

**111.** Half of all councils in Wales have outsourced the management of their leisure services to a leisure ‘trust’. Two authorities have established local authority trading companies to run their leisure provision (Gwynedd and Denbighshire). Eight councils in Wales continue to run their own leisure and library services ‘in-house’, soon to increase to nine as Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council brings its leisure services back into council control (expected 2024).

**112.** Community Leisure UK Wales provided the below table that gives a brief overview of the various delivery models by authority:

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Leisure Provision</b>	<b>Library Provision</b>
Blaenau Gwent	Aneurin Leisure (Trust)	Aneurin Leisure (Trust)
Bridgend	Halo Leisure (Trust)	Awen Cultural Trust (Trust)
Caerphilly	In-house	In-house
Cardiff	GLL (Trust)	In-house
Carmarthenshire	In-house	In-house
Ceredigion	In-house	In-house
Conwy	In-house	In-house
Denbighshire	Denbighshire Leisure (LATC)	In-house
Flintshire	Aura Leisure & Libraries (Trust)	Aura Leisure & Libraries (Trust)
Gwynedd	Byw'n Lach (LATC)	In-house
Isle of Anglesey	In-house	In-house
Merthyr Tydfil	Wellbeing@Merthyr (Trust)	Wellbeing@Merthyr (Trust)
Monmouthshire	In-house	In-house
Neath Port Talbot	Celtic Leisure (Trust) <sup>2</sup>	In-house
Newport	Newport Live (Trust)	In-house
Pembrokeshire	In-house	In-house
Powys	Freedom Leisure (Trust)	In-house
Rhondda Cynon Taff	In-house	In-house
Swansea	Freedom Leisure (Trust)	In-house
Torfaen	Torfaen Leisure Trust (Trust)	In-house
Vale of Glamorgan	Legacy Leisure (complex trading structure)	In-house
Wrexham	Freedom Leisure (Trust)	In-house

**113.** As WSA told us, there is roughly an even split in Wales today around whether leisure services are delivered in-house, or whether they are contracted to a third party, suggesting that there is no “default option in Wales at the moment”.<sup>96</sup>

**114.** According to written evidence from Audit Wales, the Auditor General for Wales has completed eight local audit reviews in the last five years looking at leisure services. He found that:

*“In some cases, the difficult fiscal environment was the catalyst for electing to work with a leisure trust and remove direct management and control of leisure services from local authorities.”<sup>97</sup>*

**115.** The Auditor General for Wales also found that:

*“In some authorities there were weaknesses in the quality, range and depth of information used to complete options appraisals when deciding on outsourcing. For example, poor financial information underpinning the different options that resulted in a skewed consideration of which option to pursue, and Members not being provided with sufficient and timely financial information to aid decision-making.”<sup>98</sup>*

**116.** There was no strong view among witnesses about which delivery model works best for leisure services, with Cwmpas noting that “different models will suit different communities”.<sup>99</sup>

**117.** WSA highlighted that “different models present different challenges and different opportunities”. For example, where there has been a community asset transfer, it said:

*“...there's a real opportunity to deliver something in partnership with the community, something where the community really buys into it, where local people have a real stake and say. Because it's not a contracted relationship I think there's no financial safety net in those delivery models, and a lot of those facilities that came through the community asset transfer*

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<sup>96</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 202

<sup>97</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>98</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>99</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 121

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*process are probably those most under threat at the moment.*<sup>100</sup>

**118.** On contracted services run by a third party on behalf of local authorities, WSA noted that those parties are “able to access alternative financing arrangements”. As a result, it suggested that some third party deliverers have “been able to modernise more effectively and readily, perhaps, than some of the in-house deliverers”.<sup>101</sup> However, on in-house delivery, WSA said that local authorities are “still in the situation where closing leisure centres, et cetera, is a politically difficult decision” and that brings with it a level of protection, despite the often increased costs.<sup>102</sup>

**119.** Sport Wales highlighted the importance of ensuring that public leisure services, in whatever format they may take, are “representative of the communities they are based in.” They went on to say that delivery models should be looked at “through the lens of equalities and tackling the undervalued or underrepresented groups that you may not necessarily see if it's a sport-specific model or a commercial-specific model.”<sup>103</sup>

**120.** Leisure trusts were keen to promote the benefits of outsourcing, with GLL (Better) stating:

*“...we're pleased and proud in the social enterprise leisure trust movement... The city of Cardiff now pay £1 million a year to have their leisure centres run, when it cost them £3 million, but the facilities are better used now than ever, because, jointly with the council, we've ensured that the investments have gone in the right place, because we know the marketplace and we know what the commercial competitors are going to get up to.”*<sup>104</sup>

**121.** When we visited Neath Leisure Centre, we heard that Celtic Leisure were provided an annual management fee of £1.4 million from the council and that fee was increased to £4.4 million post-pandemic to reflect changes in usage patterns,

<sup>100</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 180

<sup>101</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 181

<sup>102</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 182

<sup>103</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 13

<sup>104</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 61

wage inflation and current financial pressures. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has recently voted to bring its leisure services back under local authority control. It is estimated that running services in-house will cost the council £5.4 million, mainly due to pension contributions and non-domestic rates.

**122.** Swim Wales told us that they “see a correlation between the leisure trusts being closer to the community” and that “the feedback loop between the community itself and the leisure trusts seems to be stronger”:

*“Sometimes, in some of those operating models, there's a distance between the head and the tail. So, talking to the community, finding out what the community wants, can be a hard thing to do, getting that insight and data, and then reacting fairly quickly. So, I do think it's a bit like the oil tanker and the speedboat—some of these leisure trusts are more of the speedboat model, where they can listen, readjust, and, next week, they can put on a class...That's as opposed to maybe some of the other feedback loops, where you fill in a form, it goes into the reception, it goes up the ranks, through the local authority, and somebody might read it in six months' time. I'm not saying that's always the case, but for me, they seem a lot more flexible and adaptable, and closer to the people.”<sup>105</sup>*

**123.** Cllr. Rob Stewart, talking about his own authority (Swansea), said that outsourcing “was the best option”. He continued by stating that:

*“...across Wales, people will be in different positions and they may choose a different way. Had I been able to get another £1 million or £2 million a year, I would probably have tried to retain or bring everything in-house, but there were additional costs to doing that over and above what we do. We are still subsidising our partnership arrangements with Freedom, and, as I said, we're also pumping in additional money to assist them with their energy bills through this cost-of-living crisis.”<sup>106</sup>*

**124.** Cllr. Carwyn Jones on the other hand said, having looked at leisure provision in his own area (Anglesey), that there were “no advantages to outsourcing it”.<sup>107</sup> The rural nature of the county was a factor in this outcome.

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<sup>105</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 188

<sup>106</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 278

<sup>107</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 274

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**125.** The WLGA stated in its written submission that councils will not close leisure facilities, but that “all options [are] being considered” and could lead to “difficult decisions being taken in the next financial year”.<sup>108</sup>

## Delivery of library provision

**126.** While trusts are a significant feature within the leisure sector in Wales, the shift to outsourcing council library and cultural facilities has not moved at a similar pace. Instead, councils have generally favoured retaining management of libraries. At present, four authorities have outsourced their provision to a leisure or cultural trust.

**127.** We heard from SCL Cymru that their membership “is made up of all the different models of delivery” but regardless of the model, they are all governed by the same standards.<sup>109</sup> Similarly Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network (“CMLNPN”) said:

*“I’ve spoken to and visited hundreds of community libraries, and the general feedback that you get talking to people is that they don’t know who runs it, necessarily. Whether that’s a good or a bad thing for that community organisation, I don’t know, but the service at the point that they receive it is the same.”<sup>110</sup>*

**128.** CILIP Wales told us that changing the model of delivery should not be “because a local authority can’t manage its statutory duty” and that local authorities should “think about what they’re losing if they are changing that model”.<sup>111</sup>

**129.** Cwmpas, in its written evidence, noted that community trusts are sometimes established quickly to respond to an urgent desire to save a facility from closure. It commented that the process is:

*“highly demanding of individuals’ time, needs high levels of skill and capacity, often involves considerable financial commitments and even taking on serious liabilities.”<sup>112</sup>*

**130.** Similarly, CMLNPN told us that community run libraries can “be more financially viable, a cheaper alternative”, but depends on two key areas:

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<sup>108</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.11.WLGA](#)

<sup>109</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 137

<sup>110</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 140

<sup>111</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 153

<sup>112</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.04.Cwmpas](#)

*“They are the skills and experience and the enthusiasm of the community that's involved—that group—however it's structured and whoever is involved. In many cases, if it's a charity that has formed as a 'friends of' group to take over the ownership of a community library, it's what experience and skills are spread across the board of those trustees. That is what invigorates a really successful community library, but, at the same time, working very closely with other libraries across the sector, whatever model or structure you've taken, is really, really important.”<sup>113</sup>*

**131.** Cwmpas also warned that “we must not presume that community ownership is an easy answer to budgetary pressures within local authorities”. Expanding on the challenges faced by community run libraries, it said:

*“...if there wasn't an economic model there, as part of a sustainable social enterprise, social business, that was always problematic. So, it was a lot easier when the library was linked to something else, when there was an economic potential model there that included the library—and Awen Cultural Trust is a good example of that—by putting libraries and culture and theatres together. And I know, for lots of those smaller single libraries—I'm thinking here of an example up in the Afan valley—the community worked really hard, but it was based on voluntary endeavour and grant giving and raising money constantly from funds, because there wasn't that economic model, a sustainable model there.”<sup>114</sup>*

**132.** Similarly, CILIP said:

*“...we have seen that alternative models are no cheaper to run or can attain the quality of local authority delivered services. The model only works in affluent areas where staffing levels remain stable and volunteers are plentiful. The greatest need for excellent public library services might arguably not be in these authorities.”<sup>115</sup>*

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<sup>113</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraphs 163-164

<sup>114</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 37

<sup>115</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.09.CILIP](#).



**133.** This point was also raised by Gresford and District Library trustees when we visited. They acknowledged that the area where the library is located is “middle class” and there was already an active group of people in the community, so when the library faced closure there was “a big momentum to do something about it”.

**134.** According to CMLNPN:

*“There are nearly 20,000 volunteers supporting community libraries in England & Wales to grow and thrive. This not only benefits library service provision, embedding community voices throughout, but provides significant benefits and opportunities to the volunteers.”<sup>116</sup>*

**135.** CILIP raised concerns that skills can be lost by outsourcing.<sup>117</sup> This concern was also raised by UNISON Wales. In written evidence it said:

*“The use of volunteers means there is a de-professionalisation of the service offered to the public.”<sup>118</sup>*

**136.** According to UNISON Wales:

*“Libraries do not function properly without well-trained and motivated staff and library workers should be at the heart of library provision. Libraries, and the public they serve, need professional paid library staff present at all times because library staff are experienced, trained, safe, objective, multi-skilled, reliable and accountable. They are qualified in knowledge and information management, abide by an ethical framework, and must respect equalities legislation. If trained staff are not available to advise and guide, the service suffers.”<sup>119</sup>*

**137.** One Voice Wales told us that one of the models they are encouraging is the role that community and town councils can play in terms of providing funding to community interest companies:

*“One that certainly comes to mind is Resolven. A number of years ago, the community council funded the establishment of a CIC, and that helped to retain the library provision in that area. I understand, though, that some of the problems with that*

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<sup>116</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 10 Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network](#)

<sup>117</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 135

<sup>118</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 06 UNISON Wales](#)

<sup>119</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 06 UNISON Wales](#)

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*kind of model is that, obviously, it's reliant on volunteers to maintain that service, and I understand that there have been problems in terms of the number of volunteers that are available to retain that service on an ongoing basis.*"<sup>120</sup>

**138.** We heard that another benefit of community owned libraries is the “level of ear-to-the-ground consultation” and “the ability to reflect the needs of marginalised voices.”<sup>121</sup> It was suggested that they can provide “activities, services, support and outreach which goes above and beyond” what local authorities can offer<sup>122</sup> and can also be more agile to new developments or pressures.<sup>123</sup> CMLNPN told us:

*“What we've found is that the provision of a really successful community-led library is based on the passion in that community and what it wants to see delivered. It's therefore very embedded in understanding the local voices and engaging with people and consulting with people properly. I think that's the important thing.”*<sup>124</sup>

**139.** Similarly, Gresford and District Community Library told us that they can be flexible and respond to what people want. For example, the local primary school visits on a monthly basis and they hold activity groups such as knitting.

**140.** The Deputy Minister noted in her written evidence that small community run facilities are the most at risk venues as these are often not protected by contracts or the “financial backstop” in the shape of a local authority.<sup>125</sup>

**141.** However, the Deputy Minister told us in oral evidence that she “wouldn't dare” offer any advice and support for local authorities as to what they might do in terms of models for delivery of leisure and library services:

*“...it is horses for courses. I have two local authorities in my constituency. One provides direct leisure services, the other one is a trust. Which one is better? You pay your money, you take your choice. They are very different models, but they deliver a level of service, and I think that is what the local authority*

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<sup>120</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 127

<sup>121</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 139

<sup>122</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 10 Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network](#)

<sup>123</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 141

<sup>124</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 146

<sup>125</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper 5](#)

*ultimately has to look at: what is the most effective way of delivering the service that its community needs.*<sup>126</sup>

**142.** In a letter to us, dated 12 June 2023, the Deputy Minister reiterated that it is up to local authorities to “determine which model best meets the need for their community.” She also confirmed that the Welsh Government is “not aware of any specific evidence as to the efficiency of particular models within Wales.”<sup>127</sup>

## **Our view**

**143.** There was no strong overarching view among witnesses about which delivery model works best. We heard that all options have their advantages and disadvantages, and it was clear from the evidence received that there should not be a one size fits all approach – different models will suit different local authorities, dependent on their geography, the needs of their communities, their resources and so on. However, we believe that when considering delivery models, the main consideration for local authorities should be the level and quality of leisure and library services provided and their value to communities. Decisions should not be taken purely for cost management.

**144.** We also believe, where services have been outsourced, a partnership approach to service delivery between the local authority and third-party deliverer should always be maintained. Accountability for the provision of services should ultimately lie with the local authority, regardless of the model of delivery.

**145.** Our view is that it should be up to local authorities to decide what delivery model best suits their communities. However, we would encourage wider sharing of good practice, learnings, and experiences.

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities via the WLGA to provide support, guidance and share best practice relating to different models of service delivery.

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<sup>126</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 111

<sup>127</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 15 June 2023, [Paper 11](#)

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## 5. Social value

**146.** We heard that the benefits of leisure and library services to communities cannot be overstated. According to Community Leisure UK Wales:

*“They promote physical and mental well-being through various programmes and partnerships and that includes adult education, early years provision, school holiday programming, and, of course, the national exercise referral scheme. So, they reduce inequalities and ill health, they reduce the time that patients spend in hospital on NHS care, and they do that, really, by contributing to developing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 through integration of arts, culture, sport and leisure.”<sup>128</sup>*

**147.** It went on to say that there “is a real threat to the health and well-being of our communities” when those services are withdrawn, because they also lose critical support for health and well-being, educational and employment opportunities, and social cohesion.<sup>129</sup>

**148.** In its written evidence, Cwmpas highlighted a report published by Public Health Wales recently on the **Cost-of-living crisis: a public health emergency**. Cwmpas states that PHW make clear that the cost-of-living crisis is having a “profound impact on public health”. As such, Cwmpas believes it is vital that community-based library and leisure services are seen as “key assets” in this context and that:

*“Removing these assets and services from communities can have a profound impact on an already dangerous and worsening public health crisis... ensuring a consistent and sustainable delivery of library and leisure services can be a key preventative measure and investment for our health and care.”<sup>130</sup>*

**149.** Evidence received from the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales highlights the importance of leisure facilities to older people:

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<sup>128</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 5

<sup>129</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 5

<sup>130</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.04.Cwmpas](#)

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*“Leisure centres provide facilities and a range of activities for communities, including older people. If action is not taken to protect accessible leisure facilities, not only will Wales continue to see unmet demand for sport and physical activity among older people, but there is likely to be an increase in social isolation and a decline in the health and well-being of older people.”<sup>131</sup>*

**150.** With regard to libraries, the Older People’s Commissioner told us that:

*“...libraries play a crucial role in building digital skills among older people and already provide access to information and support services.”<sup>132</sup>*

**151.** SCL Cymru noted that:

*“Library services contribute to a range of Welsh Government outcomes such as literacy, skills and learning, digital inclusion, poverty, health and well-being.”<sup>133</sup>*

**152.** We heard from UNISON Wales that libraries have:

*“...really come into their own in terms of providing spaces for people who don't have the capacity in their own homes for study or for the equipment in terms of technology and Wi-Fi access, so it provides an equal platform for communities to access those services. And library services provide services for all ages from reading groups for young children right up into support for people looking to apply for jobs, with CV preparation. It provides study, it provides a warm place, and this is all of the things that are above and beyond just looking to see whether you've got reading materials that are going to interest you, but, obviously, access to books that you don't have to pay for. So, it provides that equal platform for communities.”<sup>134</sup>*

**153.** Similarly, in terms of leisure services, UNISON Wales noted that:

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<sup>131</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.05 Older People’s Commissioner for Wales](#)

<sup>132</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.05 Older People’s Commissioner for Wales](#)

<sup>133</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.01 Society of Chief Librarians Cymru](#)

<sup>134</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 233

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*"...we have all sorts of campaigns to combat obesity and other chronic health problems that are preventable through people having more healthy lifestyles, and in order to have more healthy lifestyles, you need to have good access to affordable leisure services."*<sup>135</sup>

**154.** WSA felt that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has helped in making sure that local authorities pay some regard to the wider benefits of leisure facilities, and the things against which they deliver in terms of education, health, community well-being and community safety.<sup>136</sup>

**155.** In its written evidence, Cwmpas referred to its 2022 mapping exercise which found that:

*"social enterprises across Wales produce significant social value, including improving health and well-being, supporting vulnerable people and addressing social exclusion, creating employment opportunities and providing access to services."*<sup>137</sup>

**156.** Cwmpas also highlighted the economic development impact of alternative not-for-profit delivery models, including addressing social exclusion and creating employment opportunities:

*"I think, particularly when you look at the ones that have moved away from local authority provision, by creating that economic anchor locally, providing the good quality jobs close to where people live in terms of from a foundational economy perspective, but also by creating an independent economic anchor away from the public sector, there's potential around the social value supply-chain work and procurement. You find that actually, they find that slightly easier, moving away from the sort of public sector procurement regime by becoming more independent, to try and get that spend to remain local as well."*<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 234

<sup>136</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 199

<sup>137</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 04 Cwmpas](#)

<sup>138</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 7

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**157.** Sport Wales noted the “broad way” in which social value can be captured, adding that its own analysis for sport more generally was that for every £1 spent, there was a social return of £2.88:

*“...I wouldn’t necessarily say that is a absolute given in terms of those outputs. What it does do is really help create the conversations that are required between not just local authorities, but also health services, education services, about how we pool resources to see the preventative impacts of that funding, the preventative impacts of those collaborative programmes around social prescribing, around education and so forth, to maximise the impacts of leisure facilities.”<sup>139</sup>*

**158.** Similarly, Community Leisure UK Wales noted data it had that leisure trusts specifically create “£101 of social value per person using their facilities and services and that is measured through savings to the NHS, reduced crime levels and improved mental and physical health of communities.”<sup>140</sup>

**159.** Aura Wales explained that they work with a company to review and investigate the value of some of their programmes and projects. For example:

*“One was in libraries, which was about our tackling of social isolation and loneliness, and when we reviewed those interventions and interviewed the participants, the social value for every £1 spent was £8.75. And in our active communities teams, we work collaboratively with community safety to identify areas of high anti-social behaviour, and we go in and deliver interventions using sport as a tool to engage young people. Those programmes were evaluated and, for every £1 spent, £13.16 of social value was created.”<sup>141</sup>*

**160.** Swim Wales told us that “there needs to be a lot more data and insight as to social value and the return on social value”.<sup>142</sup> This view was supported by GLL (Better). It noted that more understanding and analysis of social value is clearly required, and that:

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<sup>139</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 149

<sup>140</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 154

<sup>141</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 90

<sup>142</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 194

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*“...it’s sometimes difficult for councillors without a quantitative value in relation to the social value. So, I think that that can be difficult, and what we have done recently is to work with Sheffield Hallam University, and with other specialists in the sector, to actually quantify how much does a council get back from, say, a £1 investment. And what we have found in Lincolnshire is that we are generating over £5 for every £1 of investment, which I think is a very powerful way of demonstrating value. So, I think that that also is important—that we shouldn’t be afraid of quantifying what we do.”<sup>143</sup>*

**161.** In their written evidence, WLGA stated:

*“There is...a clear need for a robust framework to measure the social return on investment provided within leisure and library services, in terms of preventative and person-centred approaches and demand on higher cost services such as Social Care and Health services.”<sup>144</sup>*

**162.** Audit Wales told us that the Auditor General for Wales in his 2018 report on Community Asset Transfers found that local authorities were finding it difficult to monitor and measure the wellbeing and social impact of a transfer and that the scale of transfers and their value was not captured or formally recorded locally or nationally.<sup>145</sup>

**163.** Similarly, their written evidence refers to the Auditor General’s report on Social Enterprises that found:

*“...despite Social Enterprises providing services that help public bodies deliver their wellbeing objectives and other statutory responsibilities, local authorities are mostly not monitoring or evaluating their activities nor their impact.”<sup>146</sup>*

**164.** Aura Wales said that one of the main challenges “is trying to explain to people who have other budgetary demands that we can save you money”:

*“...we do save the health service, the public health service, the police, in terms of anti-social behaviour, and local authorities in*

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<sup>143</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 84

<sup>144</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.11 WLGA](#)

<sup>145</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>146</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.12 Audit Wales](#)

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*terms of some of their social services—we save them money. But I think one of the challenges is that we're not very good at actually explaining all of that, and we certainly don't quantify it, in a way. So, people are looking at the budgets for libraries and leisure and don't realise that they're actually saving other people's budgets and there doesn't seem to be that connection. So, I think that's something that we can all do to try and ease that disconnect.”<sup>147</sup>*

**165.** Audit Wales referred to its 2021 report on Local Authority Services in written evidence. The report found that recreation and cultural services “are well used and highly valued by citizens”. However, Audit Wales said:

*“Despite having a high social value, helping to maintain personal wellbeing and playing an important preventative role, these are often discretionary services and have seen the largest cuts in funding across all local authority activities...of all local authority services, recreation and sport have seen the largest reduction in expenditure and library services the third largest cut. Yet these were also the services with high citizen value and were regularly used by people – 85% of citizens we surveyed regularly used local authority recreation and sport services and 76% library services.”<sup>148</sup>*

**166.** It went on to say:

*“...the quality and depth of information that is presented to members to inform discussions and support decision making is not always comprehensive and lacked detail in key areas. For instance, the legal basis for a service is not always included, how services contribute to the delivery of wider priorities such as prevention can be brushed over and the impact on wider responsibilities such as equalities and socio-economic challenges not captured.”<sup>149</sup>*

**167.** In its written evidence, the WLGA noted that the “central role” leisure and library services play in facilitating all of the many provisions in council

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<sup>147</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 23

<sup>148</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>149</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS 12 Audit Wales](#)

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communities can be “poorly recognised” and “undervalued” at times at both council and Welsh Government level.<sup>150</sup>

**168.** SCL Cymru called for more awareness and understanding of what libraries deliver, starting with the Welsh Government:

*“On the ground, we're all engaged in this work. There is a little bit of a missing trick, though, that starts with Welsh Government...So, when the programme for government was developed and the strategies that developed as a result of that...the strategy for an ageing society...So, libraries are delivering in spades on that strategy. No-one at Government level has made that sum and realised that this is the case, so we're not part of these conversations. It's just completely missing a trick and possible investment, then, into the library offer and that focus on what we are actually delivering.”<sup>151</sup>*

**169.** It went on to say that when the strategies are put together “it’s a battle to get libraries in there.” Using the new culture strategy as an example, it noted:

*“...we are lobbying hard to get an awareness and an understanding of what libraries can actually deliver within the cultural space. It will be the only strategy, though, and for authorities to be hanging their hats on that strategic direction, it's really important right now. And it's a challenge, and we're all feeling not very confident that our voices are going to be heard loud enough within that strategy.”<sup>152</sup>*

**170.** The notion that libraries are not well understood in Government was echoed by CILIP:

*“...the digital strategy for Wales that came out just didn't reference libraries, and so, we organised a cross-sector response. I think public libraries suffer a little bit...in that they're sort of positioned here under the culture division, which is appropriate, but actually, they work across all sorts of issues, so they're in health, in education; they're cutting across all of these things, and there isn't brilliant working across those sectors.”<sup>153</sup>*

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<sup>150</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.TI.WLGA](#)

<sup>151</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 171

<sup>152</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 172

<sup>153</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 178

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**171.** The Deputy Minister told us that Sport Wales has re-commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to undertake research on the social and economic value of sport in Wales and that a report is expected later this year. She explained that the previous report published in 2018 looked at:

*“...the economic value of sport in Wales, the wider social impacts of sport in relation to health, subjective well-being, social capital, education, crime, volunteering, and what the outcome of that report showed then was that, for every £1 we invested, there was a return of £2.88.”<sup>154</sup>*

## **Our view**

**172.** Library and leisure services provide health and well-being, as well as social and economic, benefits to communities. We were given multiple figures relating to the wider social value of these services. For example, Sport Wales said that for every £1 spent on sport there was a social return of £2.88 and according to Community Leisure UK Wales, leisure trusts create £101 of social value per person using their facilities and services which is measured through savings to the NHS, reduced crime levels and improved mental and physical health of communities. The major value that leisure and library services provide to their communities cannot be overstated. However, stakeholders told us that more understanding and analysis of social value is needed.

**173.** We believe there should be an emphasis on social value when local authorities determine how best to deliver leisure and library services. We would encourage the Welsh Government to work with local authorities to consider what social value outcomes they want to achieve through public leisure and library services, and design and deliver their services accordingly. Having up-to-date, Wales-specific data on social value that is shared with local authorities would help them make informed decisions about service delivery.

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, in collaboration with local government partners, undertakes regular analysis and publication of Wales specific data on the social value return on investment in delivery of both leisure and library services.

**174.** We were concerned to hear that library services and the social value they can create may sometimes be overlooked by the Welsh Government. Libraries provide a wide range of services and activities, and it is important that there is awareness

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<sup>154</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 53

and understanding within government of what they can deliver and their benefit to wider services such as health and education.

**175.** At present, there is not a national body to lead public library development in Wales. We believe that the Welsh Government should consider establishing a Libraries Taskforce to promote the social value of libraries and share best practice, which could include providing library services with evidence and data to inform their decision making.

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should explore the options for establishing a Libraries Taskforce to promote the value of libraries and the contribution they make to their communities and wider societal benefits.

## 6. Co-location

**176.** Local authorities are increasingly looking to co-locate some of their services, predominantly in a drive to save on costs. WLGA stated that this was the result of austerity measures, but that it has forced local authorities to be innovative in its service provision. Cllr Carwyn Jones told us about the number of buildings local authorities have and their use:

*“...we have old buildings and too many buildings, and so I think there are discussions ongoing in many authorities across Wales to work to a greater degree in partnership, where the third sector and public provision come together to offer more things under one roof.”<sup>155</sup>*

**177.** Cllr. Rob Stewart believes that the days of having individual buildings to do different things “are probably behind us” and that local authorities are “trying to address some of the ongoing costs of running services by co-locating them in a single location”.<sup>156</sup>

**178.** SCL Cymru mentioned the potential benefits of co-locating services, whether that is through a hub model with permanent services under one roof or bringing services in periodically, such as cancer screening or GP surgeries.

*“It is a fantastic opportunity... I call it 'upselling' or 'cross-pollinating' services, particularly around health. [...] It's also about bringing partners in. So, we work with so many different partners in libraries. It's working with the health board, it's working with Public Health Wales, things like 'stay steady' clinics, working around falls prevention. So, they'll come in and they'll use our venues, and they have an opportunity then to access our customers in the community.”<sup>157</sup>*

**179.** However CILIP Cymru in its written evidence did express concerns that the move to a hub model could lead to a decrease in professional librarians and a “broader move towards more generic services staffing”. It stated that this may

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<sup>155</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 319

<sup>156</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 242

<sup>157</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraphs 202-203)

highlight a “decrease in local authority interest in and promotion of the library as a professional place of work”.<sup>158</sup>

**180.** Cllr Rob Stewart, responding to this, stated:

*“I don't want to distill down or degrade the expertise that the librarians have, but I think you have to balance that against the need to run a multiservice hub, and, within that model, if a librarian is unable to staff a facility that may be open seven days a week, and we don't have trained, qualified librarians who are able to do that not just in the main big hub, but also in our local hubs around our community, then you look at how best you can cover that with staff that are trained in multiple disciplines to offer the best service you can to the community.”<sup>159</sup>*

**181.** Despite some benefits to co-location of services, Cllr. Carwyn Jones noted challenges for rural areas of Wales and the need for transport links:

*“...the geographical problem we have in Wales, it's fine in the populous areas, where you have people living close to some hub, but we live in remote geographical areas. Trying to maintain those services in every part of Wales is a challenge, and it's never going to be made profitable... people have to be able to access these services and the importance of active travel is part of that.”<sup>160</sup>*

**182.** Similarly, the Older People's Commissioner said in written evidence:

*“The creation of hubs which bring together several services, and where they prevent a local service from being closed permanently, is welcomed as it allows for the provision of library and leisure services to be preserved within a community. If hubs in new sites are created, cooperation between local authorities and local transport providers is essential to ensure that older people can still access leisure and library services via public transport.”<sup>161</sup>*

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<sup>158</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.09.CILIP](#).

<sup>159</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 329

<sup>160</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 350

<sup>161</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.05.Older People's Commissioner for Wales](#)

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**183.** Awen Cultural Trust suggested that local authorities should look at alternative models of service delivery, but that this should be less parochial, noting that:

*“Rather than have 22 local authorities in Wales looking to do 22 different things, there may be a future in greater strategic partnerships, in creating a critical mass of services, and that's where you derive better value from. So, I think the next step for local authorities in Wales, rather than just looking at their own patches to see where the efficiencies might be, is to see what can be done by working together and whether that's via the regional economic partnership areas that we've got or on a health board basis, perhaps.”<sup>162</sup>*

**184.** In response to whether there is a role for Public Services Boards to consider how services could be co-located, Cllr Carwyn Jones said:

*“I think, possibly, if there was a national policy that would set the framework, then the public services board would be probably ideal to drive it forward, if there was a national policy saying, 'x amount for x amount of years', it would be a good agenda item for the public services board. In its absence, probably it is the ad hoc way that we'll go about it throughout Wales, as we do at the moment.”<sup>163</sup>*

**185.** Cllr Rob Stewart added:

*“I think there's no reason why that discussion shouldn't happen in a PSB. But we also have the same partners in our corporate joint committees, we also have the same partners in our city region meetings. So, the discussions go on in various venues...the opportunity is there, but it's on a case-by-case basis; when the opportunity arises, you don't need to wait for a regional meeting to have the discussion; you get on and explore the opportunity.”<sup>164</sup>*

**186.** The Deputy Minister's evidence paper refers to a “trend for local authorities to deliver library services via community hubs” and that “evidence indicates that this has increased the use of services, reduced costs and contributes to the resilience

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<sup>162</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 29

<sup>163</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 323

<sup>164</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 325

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of services.” It notes that co-location of such services may have “prevented the closure of services in some instances”.<sup>165</sup>

**187.** Regardless of their success, the Deputy Minister stressed during the oral evidence session that it:

*“...would very much be down to a local authority to determine whether or not that would be effective in their particular area. Because the impact, really, we don't yet know; it's still a very new innovation.”<sup>166</sup>*

**188.** The Deputy Minister acknowledged that there is no “one-size-fits-all” option and that co-location may be more challenging for local authorities that cover very large rural areas:

*“...transport is challenging in most areas at the moment, as we know...But, obviously, that would be one of the considerations that a local authority would have to think about, in terms of, if they were going to co-locate a number of services or create some kind of cultural hub, would they do that in an area where they knew that transport was available to get to, so that that made it accessible to somebody, or would that mean that, by doing that, there would be other communities that wouldn't be able to access, and so, therefore, that they would feel that that wouldn't be the way forward.”<sup>167</sup>*

**189.** The Deputy Minister’s evidence paper also refers to the co-location of library services with other cultural services which “encourages use and sustainability”. In her oral evidence, she rejected the argument that co-location “dumbs down the expertise in libraries.” She said:

*“...we still have to...have a statutory public library service that meets particular standards. So, that will still require library expertise, it just means that that service can be located with other services. And if somebody is accessing another service, while they're accessing that other service, they might see that there's a library there and go and use that as well. For some people, the library is still a place where they just want to go and*

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<sup>165</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper.5](#)

<sup>166</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 64

<sup>167</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 68

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*borrow a book; for other people, it can be...something very new—digital, something where we can do very innovative things.*<sup>168</sup>

## Our view

**190.** We heard that local authorities are increasingly co-locating some of their services into community ‘hubs’, partly in a drive to save on costs, but also for wider benefits, such as improving the accessibility of services. Hubs can offer several benefits to communities in that they offer a wide range of services under one roof, ranging from parent and toddler groups to health and housing support, and others.

**191.** However, we heard that some witnesses were concerned that the role of librarian as a profession could be diluted where the hub model is applied. Some feared that the need for staff with more generic service knowledge will replace professional librarians, impacting negatively on the library provision as a result. To ensure the continued use of libraries, we believe that library services should be positioned in a prominent place within hubs. We would encourage the sharing of best practice among local authorities and their delivery partners in terms of how to make effective use of libraries within hub models. Profitable services in hubs should not be prioritised over libraries - local authorities and delivery partners should consider their social responsibilities when making decisions about co-locating services and their design.

**192.** We also heard of challenges in co-locating services in rural areas. If services are to be co-located, they need to be accessible to all. As we heard in evidence, transport is clearly an issue at present, and should be a key consideration in any decision to co-locate. This should include the use of community transport services.

**193.** It was clear from the evidence received that local authorities need to make decisions based on the needs of their own communities, and that more evidence and robust data is needed to inform decision-making. We heard that evidence to date indicates that the co-location has increased the use of services, reduced costs and contributes to the resilience of services. Given that hubs are a relatively new innovation, we recommend that the Welsh Government continues to monitor and evaluate their success, and that findings are shared with local authorities in order to inform their decision-making. Local authorities must adopt an intelligent approach to decision-making on co-location, particularly in relation to library services, to ensure that they take into account the importance of libraries within the overall services provided in hubs.

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<sup>168</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 69

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Welsh Government, with local government partners, monitors and evaluates the efficiency and effectiveness of co-location in Wales to date and shares these findings with local authorities.

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities via the WLGA to ensure that transport, including community transport services, is a key consideration in decision-making on the co-location of services.

## 7. Financial support

**194.** Regardless of who runs leisure and library services, the recent financial challenges, particularly in relation to energy costs, has resulted in difficult decisions for councils and those running the facilities. The energy crisis has disproportionately affected leisure centres, especially those with swimming pools where energy use is high. This has raised the prospect of reduced opening hours and closures in some areas.

**195.** As stated by Audit Wales in their written evidence:

*“...both leisure and library services have operated in particularly challenging circumstances in recent years. The effects of the pandemic, ongoing recruitment and retention problems in public services, inflationary pressures and limited protection from budget cuts are all having an adverse impact.”<sup>169</sup>*

**196.** Referring to the most recent data published by StatsWales, Audit Wales went on to say:

*“...it is clear that local authorities have found it challenging to maintain investment in library and leisure services in the last 12 years. Between 2009-10 and 2021-22, spending by local authorities on libraries has fallen in real terms by 39%, from £67.2 million in 2009-10 to £40.9 million in 2021-22; and spend on recreation and sport by 43% from £214.2 million to £122.1 million in the same period.”<sup>170</sup>*

**197.** We heard that energy costs in the sector have roughly tripled for some organisations<sup>171</sup> and that some trusts operating services on behalf of authorities report an increase of up to £1 million per local authority contract.<sup>172</sup> Aura Wales, for example, told us that its energy bills grew by over £600,000 in the last year and that without local authority support with its energy costs, it suggested that it “couldn’t have survived”.<sup>173</sup> Leisure centres were not included in the UK Government’s Energy Bills Discount Scheme.

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<sup>169</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>170</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.12 Audit Wales](#)

<sup>171</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 205

<sup>172</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07 Welsh Sports Association](#)

<sup>173</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 110

**198.** When we visited Plas Madoc Leisure Centre we heard that the energy crisis was “crippling” the charity and that they are currently in negotiations with Wrexham County Borough Council in terms of support.

**199.** We heard from Swim Wales that energy costs may be “three to five times” higher now than they were, and that there could be as much as a £30 million gap in the finances of leisure trusts. While the local government settlement and the use of reserves may have eased some of those pressures, there could be a “best-case” funding gap of £10-12 million over the next 12 months as a result of leisure centre energy bills.<sup>174</sup>

**200.** Sport Wales told us that the sector was “quite resilient” coming out of the pandemic as a result of “a lot of really innovative work to protect itself” and investment from the Welsh Government. However, it said that:

*“...the perfect storm of staffing, the cost of living and operation costs and inflation and the energy crisis that have come about now have almost, to an extent, undone a lot of that work, or at least set us back to a point—. We would have thought this would be a really positive, redemption year almost, if I can use that term, and, instead, it's just firefighting new and emerging challenges.”<sup>175</sup>*

**201.** Written evidence from Community Leisure UK Wales notes that 80 per cent of its members project a deficit outturn at year end, with an anticipated combined deficit of over £5.4 million for only leisure trusts.<sup>176</sup> Leisure trusts receive a management fee from the local authority to manage the facilities, but Community Leisure told us that the:

*“...management fee has stayed flat, so that's actually a real-terms reduction, or, in some cases, they've also been reduced in the past few years...the operators then become more reliant on income from trading, so that means you are more reliant on your cafes or on your events taking place, in parks, summer events.”<sup>177</sup>*

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<sup>174</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraphs 207-209

<sup>175</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 22

<sup>176</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.02 Community Leisure Wales](#)

<sup>177</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 48

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**202. Earlier this year it was reported that up to 150 swimming pools in Wales were at risk of closure due to energy costs**, raising the prospect of closures in some areas. Swim Wales estimated that, before the pandemic, 500,000 people in Wales participated in aquatic activity each week across 309 pools in Wales.<sup>178</sup> However, GLL (Better) told us that it “currently costs over £12 to provide a swim and nobody pays more than £5, so that money has to come from somewhere.”<sup>179</sup>

**203. The UK Government announced a £63 million fund** in March to support swimming pools in England. The Deputy Minister noted in her evidence that the Welsh Government will receive around £3.5 million in consequential funding as a result of this announcement. The evidence paper goes on to state that:

*“...the Welsh Government is currently considering the potential use of the c£3.5m consequential funding that will be received recognising the significant funding already provided to Local Authorities and wider funding available to the sector. It must also be noted that it is an important principle of devolution that consequential funding is not ringfenced for similar purposes in devolved governments.”<sup>180</sup>*

**204.** The Deputy Minister continues by asserting that:

*“Welsh Ministers are continuing to assess and consider where the greatest impact will be when making funding decisions in line with Welsh circumstances and priorities in the context of the range of identified pressures, including active discussions on pay and mitigating the cost-of-living crisis that we continue to face.”<sup>181</sup>*

**205.** On whether the Welsh Government will be spending the consequential funding on swimming pools, the Deputy Minister told us during the oral evidence session that the £1.2 million available to help 120 swimming pools with energy costs “isn’t going to go anywhere near touching what they need”.<sup>182</sup>

**206.** The Deputy Minister continued by noting that “a wider conversation is needed with the sector about long-term sustainability around energy-saving

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<sup>178</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.08.Swim.Wales](#)

<sup>179</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 116

<sup>180</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper.5](#)

<sup>181</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper.5](#)

<sup>182</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 88

measures”, particularly around how swimming pools manage their energy efficiency for the longer term.<sup>183</sup> According to the Deputy Minister:

*“£1.2 million divided between them is £10,000. That's one month's energy bill. That isn't a solution. The solution is long-term energy efficiency. I understand all of the pressures and the difficulties that all of these pools and leisure centres are facing, but a one-off payment of £10,000, to me, is not efficient use of that money, because that doesn't solve the problem. I think we've got to work in collaboration with local authorities and leisure providers to look at a longer-term strategy and, hopefully, local authorities can get their leisure services over this hump and work with us to put longer term energy efficiency measures in place.”<sup>184</sup>*

**207.** Despite this, Swim Wales told us that a figure of £3.5 million in consequential would provide the sector with “a lifeline”<sup>185</sup>.

**208.** The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee undertook an inquiry during Autumn 2022 on **increasing costs and its impact on culture and sport**, publishing a report in November 2022. The Committee made several recommendations, including:

*“The Welsh Government should 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.”<sup>186</sup>*

**209.** The Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism accepted the recommendation, noting in her response:

*“The Welsh Government recognises the exceptional inflationary pressures to utility costs and costs of living pressures at the arm's length bodies and also local sector organisations. To assist with these pressures, Welsh Ministers have agreed to provide £3,750,000 during the 2022-23 financial year to the National Library of Wales; Amgueddfa Cymru - National*

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<sup>183</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 88

<sup>184</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 97

<sup>185</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 210

<sup>186</sup> Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, **Report on the impact of increasing costs**, November 2022

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*Museum Wales; the arts sector via the Arts Council of Wales, the sports sector via Sport Wales; the independent museums and community libraries in Wales; the Books Council of Wales; and the independent creative industries in Wales.*<sup>187</sup>

**210.** It is unclear whether this additional targeted funding will be available in the 2023-24 financial year.

**211.** WSA called for a “long-term plan for the financial stability” of public leisure services.<sup>188</sup>

**212.** Community Leisure UK Wales suggested that the financial challenges faced by leisure and library services could be addressed by:

*“...ensuring that local government is properly resourced, because it is the key partner in leisure and library services, whether it delivers them itself or it works with a charitable operator or another model, obviously, taking into consideration increased costs of living and inflation.”*<sup>189</sup>

**213.** Cllr. Rob Stewart noted that the local government settlement, despite being more than was expected is “still well below inflation” which has resulted in “huge pressures”. He said that in most councils, education and social care will take the majority of the budget, “so you've got to try and cover all of your other services with what's left”.<sup>190</sup>

**214.** We also heard of challenges around meeting national living wage increases. Community Leisure UK Wales told us:

*“...from 1 April, a 9.7 per cent increase in the national living wage, which is the right thing to do, but to be able to afford to put a 9.7 per cent increase across all pay scales in an organisation adds a lot of pressure on the bottom line....And that's not to say that operators do not want to pay; of course*

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<sup>187</sup> Welsh Government, [Response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee's Report on the impact of increasing costs](#), January 2023

<sup>188</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.07 Welsh Sports Association](#)

<sup>189</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 181

<sup>190</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 241

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*they do want to pay that, it's just talking about budgets and the affordability of that.*<sup>191</sup>

**215.** In addition to challenges in maintaining adequate pay differentials and national living wage increases, Aura Wales also noted that there are costs associated with bringing people into the sector in terms of paying for qualifications such as national pool lifeguard and swimming teacher.<sup>192</sup>

**216.** Coupled with the increasing cost of energy, the WSA noted increasing evidence that the cost of living is having an impact on participation levels in sport, most notably for those on lower incomes. The WSA asserted that it does not want to see participation become the preserve of the middle and upper income brackets in Wales.<sup>193</sup>

**217.** For example, Swim Wales told us that many children leave school unable to swim, “particularly those from less affluent families and those from ethnically diverse backgrounds”.<sup>194</sup> We heard that only 50 per cent of the 1,600 plus primary schools in Wales actively take part in school swimming, which is not mandated or regulated by Estyn in the way that other subjects are.<sup>195</sup> It went on to say:

*“It's not a blame thing, but I think we've taken our eye off the ball with regard to school swimming in a big way, because those children that can't afford those lessons—. 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*

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<sup>191</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 31

<sup>192</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 16

<sup>193</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 205

<sup>194</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.08.Swim.Wales](#)

<sup>195</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 167

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*say it, white middle-class children will be able to swim and the rest won't.*<sup>196</sup>

**218.** The Deputy Minister told us that she recently met with the Minister for Education to discuss the lack of schools that are actually engaging in swimming lessons. She went on to say:

*“What we provide is free swimming, and Welsh Government is funding that, but that's not free swimming lessons, and lessons cost money. Swim Wales provide qualified teachers, and so on, but their concern is the cost of the swimming lesson, and I absolutely get that. But I think part of the answer to that is we have every school involved in swimming lessons.. To take one of the councils, in my own constituency, in Merthyr Tydfil, there is not one school in Merthyr Tydfil that engages in swimming lessons, and one of those schools actually has a pool and they don't deliver swimming lessons for the kids. I have met with the Minister for education to discuss that, and we're going to try and do some work jointly with local authorities on persuading them of the value of ensuring that children have free swimming lessons delivered by school from an early age.”*<sup>197</sup>

## **Our view**

**219.** Rising energy costs have had a huge impact on local authority leisure services. We heard that energy costs may be three to five times higher now than they were a few years ago, and that some leisure service providers would not have survived the winter without local authority support towards their bills.

**220.** The energy crisis has been particularly challenging for leisure facilities with swimming pools. We were surprised to hear that it currently costs over £12 to provide a swim, which is more than double what people normally pay to use the pool.

**221.** We are aware that the UK Government announced a £63 million fund in March to support swimming pools in England. As a result, the Welsh Government will receive around £3.5 million in consequential funding, of which only £1.2

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<sup>196</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 169

<sup>197</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 104

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million is revenue. We heard that the Welsh Government is yet to decide how it will use this funding.

**222.** We acknowledge that £1.2 million will not go very far in terms of helping swimming pools with energy costs. However, given the current situation, we believe that any contribution, regardless of amount, will make a difference. For that reason, we recommend that the Welsh Government allocates the consequential funding to public swimming pools. As we heard, there are 500,000 people aquatically active across the whole of Wales every week, including 150,000 children in swimming lessons.<sup>198</sup> Swimming offers physical and mental health benefits, and is also a life skill. It is therefore important that swimming pools remain open.

**Recommendation 12.** We recommend that the Welsh Government allocates the £3.5 million in consequential funding to swimming pools, especially those which may be unviable without additional support. The Welsh Government should update the Committee when a decision about the allocation of the additional £3.5 million has been made.

**223.** Nonetheless, we agree with the Deputy Minister that allocating the consequential funding to swimming pools does not offer a solution to energy efficiency issues, and we urge that work to develop a longer-term strategy, as well as shorter-term solutions, is progressed at pace. We will explore this in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is clear that leisure and library services are in need of more immediate support to help them navigate the current crisis. We therefore endorse the recommendation made by the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee in its November 2022 report on increasing costs and its impact on culture and sport. That Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should 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.

**Recommendation 13.** We endorse the recommendation of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee that the Welsh Government should 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.

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<sup>198</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 152

**Recommendation 14.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on what additional financial support it will provide leisure and library services to deal with the current energy and cost-of-living crises.

**224.** We are concerned that the cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on participation levels in sport. For example, we heard that the cost of swimming lessons has doubled since the pandemic, making it unaffordable for families, particularly those on lower incomes. We were surprised and disappointed to hear that only 50 per cent of primary schools in Wales take part in school swimming, and that some schools with pools may not even deliver swimming lessons. We appreciate that leisure providers provide free swimming for children in Wales through a Welsh Government initiative, but they need to be able to swim for this to be of benefit. Given the increased costs of swimming lessons, it is more important than ever that children have free swimming lessons in school, especially as swimming and water safety are life skills.

**225.** We welcome the fact that the Deputy Minister has met with the Minister for Education to discuss the lack of schools engaging in swimming lessons, and that they have agreed to undertake joint work with local authorities on persuading them of the value of ensuring that children have free swimming lessons delivered by school from an early age. We believe that there should be an uniform approach across Wales to ensure that children leaving primary school have the ability to swim and that the Welsh Government should work with local authorities and their delivery partners on such a strategy.

**Recommendation 15.** We recommend that the Welsh Government updates the Committee on progress to develop a strategy to encourage primary schools to provide free swimming lessons, and how it is working with leisure providers on this strategy.

## 8. Capital funding and decarbonisation

**226.** While there are immediate hurdles for councils and trusts to navigate, such as energy costs, there are also longer-term challenges to address too, particularly in relation to decarbonisation.

**227.** GLL (Better) told us:

*“All the buildings have got a massive carbon challenge. So, even as we move through getting the energy crisis stabilised...there's still a clear and present and major problem for Cardiff Council and GLL, particularly in leisure centres: £70,000 a month missing that is just going to the energy companies, basically.”<sup>199</sup>*

**228.** Aura Wales also described ageing facilities across Wales which are “difficult to decarbonise”.<sup>200</sup> Community Leisure UK Wales told the Committee that council “leisure facilities are consistently in the top five of high-emitting buildings”,<sup>201</sup> and that investment in decarbonisation and modernisation of leisure and library facilities will “ensure that they remain attractive, accessible, but also environmentally friendly”.<sup>202</sup>

**229.** We heard calls for a long-term strategy of building renewals. According to GLL (Better):

*“There's a transition we all need to go through on this journey to carbon neutral, reducing energy consumption. It's going to take a lot of capital, it's a big journey, we've all got to go on it together, and it's not about outsourcing or insourcing; it's about partnership working.”<sup>203</sup>*

**230.** Awen Cultural Trust noted that it was unaware of public sector capital funding that could be accessed by leisure or cultural trusts for decarbonisation programmes:

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<sup>199</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 19

<sup>200</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 110

<sup>201</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 30

<sup>202</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 182

<sup>203</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 119

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*“What we don't have in Wales is that public sector decarbonisation capital scheme that we can access. We're doing a lot ourselves, but I would urge Government to think of that, so that we can access the capital to really make a difference, not just to tackle the energy costs, but to get us to that net-zero position that we all want to get to.”<sup>204</sup>*

**231.** The Welsh Government do provide capital funding to Sport Wales to administer, which can be used to assist with the decarbonisation of leisure facilities and make them more energy efficient. The latest round of funding, £3.1 million, was announced earlier this year.

**232.** In terms of access to Sport Wales funding, we heard that while the fund is specific to national partners such as local authorities and national governing bodies, “there is nothing, in theory, stopping those organisations that you noted there [community run facilities] having conversations, and the local authority, an NGB, or a national partner coming in on their behalf”.<sup>205</sup> Sport Wales noted that it has funded “a number of organisations, be they specific clubs, leisure trusts, community-run facilities”<sup>206</sup>. However, it said that “the scope of the challenge extends beyond the capacity of the capital funding available”.<sup>207</sup>

**233.** Similarly, WSA told us that they welcomed “the record levels of capital investment coming via Sport Wales into the sector”, however:

*“...local authority leisure services' capital requirements are probably quite a lot higher than those going through Sport Wales. And Sport Wales is funded to deliver sports development activity, for the most part, and shouldn't necessarily be expected to fund the capital requirements of local authority leisure provision, especially given the scale of them.”<sup>208</sup>*

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<sup>204</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 105

<sup>205</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 27

<sup>206</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2023, paragraph 27

<sup>207</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, [LALLS.03 Sport Wales](#)

<sup>208</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2023, paragraph 158

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**234.** Cllr. Carwyn Jones told us that:

*“...it is hard to access this money as a local authority outside the realms of grant funding from the Government, to be honest. I don't think there are many other avenues.”<sup>209</sup> (para 364)*

**235.** Local government noted a potential lack of vision for public leisure and library services accompanied by long-term capital funding. Cllr. Carwyn Jones stated that:

*“One thing that's worked very successfully here in Wales is the twenty-first century schools policy, where £1.4 billion was invested in building 150 new education establishments. But what we don't have in the area that we're discussing today is that kind of policy: what's our vision for leisure and libraries and joint provision for the future? If there were a policy in Wales to invest over the next 20 or 30 years in provision, then authorities would be able to collaborate in the knowledge that a capital grant was available to create new, effective hubs that would provide multi-agency services to our residents.”<sup>210</sup>*

**236.** Cllr. Rob Stewart reflected on the size of the challenge to decarbonise its buildings in Swansea alone, albeit looking at the broader estate not only leisure and library facilities:

*“We've worked on the detail of our net-zero targets for the council for 2030, and I think we came up with a figure of about £700 million if we wanted to decarbonise the whole of our estate. I think, in the most recent budget, the allocation was about £20 million for that purpose. So, if we're serious about doing those sorts of things, not just in leisure, but in all of our services, then we're going to have to find a lot more money and attract a lot more investment in order to do that.”<sup>211</sup>*

**237.** According to Cllr. Stewart the reality is that “some of the buildings...whether they're for leisure purposes, libraries or other services, will not be able to be brought up to the sorts of standards that we will need.”<sup>212</sup> This was echoed by Cllr.

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<sup>209</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 364

<sup>210</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 320

<sup>211</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 359

<sup>212</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 359

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Carwyn Jones who said that in order to reach net zero by 2030, things need to be accelerated very quickly in terms of capital funding, but:

*“...there are some buildings that have gone past the point where you can really spend—you're putting a sticking plaster on them, and maybe it's a case of throwing good money after bad with some buildings.”<sup>213</sup>*

**238.** The Deputy Minister’s evidence paper refers to Community Leisure data which suggests leisure operators have already made investments in energy efficient systems where they can. However, nearly two thirds of the leisure estate is ageing and past its replacement date. It highlights the challenges faced by leisure providers with the current financial pressures, noting that “leisure trusts are unable to invest further in decarbonisation and facility refurbishment.” It notes that while local authority leisure centres and swimming pools face immediate revenue challenges, “the lack of capital investment is a more pressing issue, particularly in the context of the Welsh Government’s commitment to achieving a zero-carbon economy”.<sup>214</sup>

**239.** The Deputy Minister’s paper continues by highlighting that “local authorities and other public sector organisations can access technical and financial support from the Welsh Government’s Energy Service, to improve the energy efficiency of their swimming pools and leisure centres (including those managed by leisure trusts).” The paper also notes that the Welsh Government has “committed £16m in capital funding over the next two years to Sport Wales to develop facilities across Wales, which includes helping upgrade sport facilities with energy saving measures.”<sup>215</sup>

**240.** During the oral evidence session, the Deputy Minister told us that:

*“...the level of local authority funding has increased significantly, including capital funding, and so it is a matter for local authorities to determine how they address their net-zero objectives across their estates, including sports and leisure facilities.”<sup>216</sup>*

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<sup>213</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 4 May 2023, paragraph 361

<sup>214</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper 5](#)

<sup>215</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, 24 May 2023, [Paper 5](#)

<sup>216</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 119

**241.** She said that the Welsh Government does not currently have any plans to develop a scheme similar to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Education Programme for leisure and library services, stating that:

*“...this is very much a service that is delivered via local authorities, and we are trying to support local authorities to be able to do that with the level of funding that we are able to deliver.”<sup>217</sup>*

**242.** The Deputy Minister also said that she hopes that the Welsh Government is “doing enough” to promote its Energy Service:

*“...that is something that I’m always happy to take back and have a look at...if there is any concern that what is available isn’t reaching the parts that it should reach, because...we do engage with the sector at a specific level, but if we have to look further and wider than that, then I’m quite happy to do so.”<sup>218</sup>*

## **Our View**

**243.** There are significant challenges facing local authorities and trusts in decarbonising ageing leisure and library facilities, which is particularly concerning given the Welsh Government’s Net Zero plan.

**244.** We are concerned that some trusts are unaware that they can access the capital funding available to make leisure facilities more energy efficient and sustainable, which is administered by Sport Wales. There is an urgent need to address this given that a number of leisure operators are in desperate need of support.

**Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government explores how it can raise awareness of the support for decarbonisation of leisure and library facilities.

**245.** Regardless of the funding currently available, we believe that the Welsh Government needs to invest more in the decarbonisation and modernisation of leisure and library facilities as a matter of urgency. We are concerned that current funding will simply not go far enough, especially considering that it will be impossible to bring some buildings up to standard. We are also concerned that decarbonisation of leisure and library facilities appears to be less of a priority,

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<sup>217</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 119

<sup>218</sup> Local Government and Housing Committee, Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2023, paragraph 122



compared to other local authority services. We find this surprising if the Welsh Government is to meet its Net Zero Carbon targets.

**246.** We agree with stakeholders that a long-term strategy for modernisation and decarbonisation is needed. There seems to be a lack of vision for public leisure and library services accompanied by long-term capital funding. We would welcome a policy similar to the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme to ensure that our leisure and library facilities are fit for the future. However, we also recognise that leisure and library services are in need of more immediate support to improve the energy efficiency of their facilities. We would therefore urge the Welsh Government to also consider what additional short term funding could be provided to leisure and library services towards decarbonisation.

**Recommendation 17.** We recommend that the Welsh Government invests in supporting the decarbonisation and refurbishment of leisure and library facilities across Wales. This should include shorter-term solutions, as well a long-term strategy, to help local authorities and delivery providers improve the energy efficiency of their facilities as a matter of urgency.

## List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the [\*\*Committee's website\*\*](#).

Date	Name and Organisation
23 March 2023	<p><b>Jennifer Huygen, Head of Policy and Strategic Partnerships,</b> Community Leisure UK</p> <p><b>Owen Hathway, Assistant Director for Investments, Insights, Policy and Public Affairs,</b> Sports Wales</p> <p><b>Glenn Bowen, Interim Chief Executive,</b> Cwmpas</p> <p><b>Lyn Cadwallader, Chief Executive</b> One Voice Wales</p>
29 March 2023	<p><b>Diana Edmonds, National Libraries Director,</b> GLL (Better)</p> <p><b>Mark Sesnan, Chief Officer,</b> GLL (Better)</p> <p><b>Richard Hughes, Chief Executive,</b> Awen Cultural Trust</p> <p><b>Sara Mogel, Chair,</b> Aura Wales</p> <p><b>Sian Williams, Leisure Development Manager,</b> Aura Wales</p> <p><b>Matthew Williams, Head of Policy and Communications,</b> Welsh Sports Association</p> <p><b>Fergus Feeney, Chief Executive Officer,</b> Swim Wales</p> <p><b>Dominic MacAskill, Regional Secretary,</b> UNISON Cymru Wales</p>
4 May 2023	<p><b>Amy Staniforth, Relationship Manager,</b> Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Wales</p> <p><b>Nicola Pitman, Chair,</b> Society of Chief Librarians Cymru</p>

Date	Name and Organisation
	<p><b>Chris Neath, Network Manager,</b> Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network</p> <p><b>Sharon Davies, Head of Education,</b> Welsh Local Government Association</p> <p><b>Councillor Carwyn Jones, Portfolio Holder – Corporate and Customer Experience,</b> Isle of Anglesey County Council</p> <p><b>Councillor Rob Stewart, Leader,</b> Swansea Council</p>
24 May 2023	<p><b>Dawn Bowden MS,</b> Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism</p> <p><b>Jason Thomas, Director Culture, Sport and Tourism,</b> Welsh Government</p> <p><b>Neil Welch, Head of Sport,</b> Welsh Government</p> <p><b>Mary Ellis, Head of Libraries, Archives &amp; Resilience,</b> Welsh Government</p>

## List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the [\*\*Committee's website\*\*](#).

Reference	Organisation
<b>LALLS 01</b>	Society of Chief Librarians Cymru
<b>LALLS 02</b>	Community Leisure UK Wales
<b>LALLS 03</b>	Sport Wales
<b>LALLS 04</b>	Cwmpas
<b>LALLS 05</b>	Older People's Commissioner for Wales
<b>LALLS 06</b>	UNISON Wales
<b>LALLS 07</b>	Welsh Sports Association
<b>LALLS 08</b>	Swim Wales
<b>LALLS 09</b>	CILIP Wales
<b>LALLS 10</b>	Community Managed Libraries National Peer Network
<b>LALLS 11</b>	Welsh Local Government Association
<b>LALLS 12</b>	Audit Wales