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Response to Our Future Wales

This submission responds to the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales conversation on Our Future Wales on behalf of Community Leisure UK members in Wales.

About Us

Community Leisure UK is the trade association that represents charities, societies and CICs delivering public leisure and culture services across the UK. Commonly they are called trusts, and importantly members reinvest their surpluses into the services and facilities that they run and manage.

Our 110 members are the largest collective of public leisure service providers across the UK. Over 45% of public leisure provision in England, 85% in Scotland, and 41% in Wales is delivered by trusts. The model of trusts is founded on cross-subsidy to ensure those communities who are in most need of inclusive activities and services, can access them. Trusts:

- cross-subsidise services i.e. more profitable leisure activities will subsidise some health, community, library activities etc;
- cross-subsidise individuals i.e. using income from those who can afford to pay, to support reduced cost or free activities for those with less disposable income.

Across Wales, our members' reach into communities is vast accumulating 27m user visits in 2018. Trusts in Wales operate 140 sport- and cultural facilities and even more green spaces i.e. parks, playgrounds and skate parks, have a combined turnover of nearly £150 million, employ over 3000 staff and are critically supported by over 200 volunteers.

Member trusts in Wales are: [Aneurin Leisure Trust](#), [Aura Wales](#), [Celtic Leisure](#), [Freedom Leisure](#) (Powys, Swansea, Wrexham), [GLL](#) (Cardiff), [Halo Leisure](#) (Bridgend County), [Newport Live](#), and [Torfaen Leisure Trust](#).

Members typically have contracts for services with local authority partners to deliver across a breadth of leisure and culture services. The majority of our members are called a single-contract trust i.e. they deliver the services and manage the facilities on behalf of one, local authority partner. A small number of members hold multiple contracts across England and Wales. Members are independent, autonomous, community-rooted and agile. They are legally registered as Company Limited by Guarantee and registered charity, Community Benefit Society with charitable status, Community Interest Company, or Charitable Incorporated Organisation / Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

We work closely with all members across the UK and gather insight on the issues that matter to them as organisations who support, develop and contribute to the wellbeing of their local community and the economy. Equally as important is discussing the opportunities for the future, best practice across Wales, and solutions to current and future challenges. We have used these discussions and engagement with members in Wales to enable us to build this response.

Detailed response

The important role and value of leisure and culture services can fly under the radar, particularly within central and local government when other services take priority, and often rightly so. However, our

members contribute significantly to policy and community objectives across large parts of Wales – as all the services they deliver are focused on improving community wellbeing through varying services and activities. Whether that is to help people rehabilitate after illness, to improve their mental health through sport and cultural activity, or to simply offer a warm, clean and safe place to be.

Because of our members' role, we are keen to take this opportunity to highlight the main issues facing future generations with regards to public leisure and culture, and make recommendations to tackle these key issues to improve Wales' future.

There are five Well-being Goals that our members most feel they contribute to. We will explore these below to help ensure that leisure and culture trusts are recognised as significant contributors to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and its goals.

Well-being Goal	Ways through which charitable trusts contribute:
A Healthier Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating opportunities for more people to enjoy sport and culture to participate in physical and mental well-being activities more often; ● Improving people's health through the delivery and growth of the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS); ● Providing classes and programmes for people with long-term health conditions and/or who are recovering from a medical condition; ● Deeply caring about mental health in the workplace and actively working towards supporting staff members in improving their wellbeing while creating flexible working conditions where possible <p><u>Illustrative example of trusts' work:</u> Halo Leisure and Bridgend County Borough Council looked at how their collaborative approach to the delivery of leisure facilities is impacting on physical activity levels in the community. Through entering Quest for Active Communities, QUEST recognised the impact the partnership between Bridgend Council and Halo in tackling inactivity and improving participation by awarding an 'excellent' in their recent Active Communities inspection. This is the first time in Wales that this quality model has been undertaken jointly as a partnership between local authority and its delivery partner. Halo Leisure were also highest scoring in Quest for Communities for whole of UK 2018.</p>
A Wales of Cohesive Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing community facilities where clubs, groups and societies can meet; ● Bringing people together to participate in and watch sports competitions and reading and other cultural events; ● Providing accessible and inclusive activities for diverse audiences, from young children to teenagers and their parents, people from the LGBTI+ community, people from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds, middle aged people and the elderly, and local artists, and entrepreneurs; ● Trading as an employee-led organisation which operates for the benefit of the local communities <p><u>Illustrative example of trusts' work:</u> Aura Wales developed and manage Community Sports Hubs to help tackle anti-social behaviour and give the opportunity of taking part in free sport to young people in Flintshire. In February 2019, the sessions had been running for 18 months and had seen over 4000 attendances across 7 different sites. Aura Wales is part of a community partnership group which involves police, fire service, ASB team, youth justice and youth service. Due to budget cuts and the large number of youth clubs closing down, local areas were seeing a rise in ASB and crime with young people. Upon speaking to the young people in these communities it was clear that a lot of their behaviour was due to boredom and the cost of doing other activities. Since the Hubs have been established the</p>

	<p>police have seen a number of ASB hotspots decline and have established closer relationships with young people in their area.</p>
<p>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Welsh Language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encouraging reading for pleasure through reader development activities; ● Sustaining, promoting and creating access to local heritage and cultural diversity; ● Sustaining and developing museum, theatre, and library services which are popular amongst residents and a mainstay of local community life; ● Implementing an active Welsh Language Policy and Commitment to the Welsh speaking community <p><u>Illustrative example of trusts' work:</u> Celtic Leisure manages the Gwyn Hall through which they actively encourage people to experience and join in culture on their doorstep. This includes visiting for live theatre shows, cinema screenings or popping in for a bite to eat or drink enabling people to meet and socialise — increasing wellbeing and reducing isolation. They offer theatrical space for local groups to perform and watch live performances. The Gwyn Hall also screens live broadcasts of National Theatre Live and the Royal Opera House. In September 2019 the Gwyn Hall hosted the Wales International Film Festival. This festival provided workshops from the film industry for the local community and also screening short films written and directed globally.</p>
<p>A More Equal Wales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitoring the Gender Pay Gap and general gender balance among staff to actively address gender inequality; ● Working with Chwarae Teg to improve their gender balance strategy and FairPlay Employer service; ● Providing free of charge access to books, ICT, newspapers and local information to help bridge the social, digital and information divide; ● Providing free of charge access to children's play areas to help encourage the next generation to develop physically active lifestyles; ● Providing access to sports activities and leisure centres at discounted rates to encourage participation from under-represented and targeted social groups. <p><u>Illustrative example of trusts' work:</u> Torfaen Leisure trust has been recognised for its commitment to diverse and inclusive practices within the workplace. The Trust, responsible for the delivery of leisure services in five sites across the Borough of Torfaen, has received the Chwarae Teg Silver FairPlay Employer Award for their commitment towards gender equality, inclusive approach towards working practices, and staff engagement. Chief Executive, Angharad Collins, is passionate about the Trust, their employees and their customers and is dedicated to working with Chwarae Teg on their FairPlay Employer Service Action Plan, designed in line with the goals of their 5 year Strategic Plan.</p>
<p>A Prosperous Wales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employing, on average, over 400 members of staff (FT and PT), the vast majority of whom live within their local Counties and contribute to the local economy; ● Striving to be a Living Wage employer and continuously reviewing staff salaries, benefits, and development support; ● Working with apprenticeships, internships, work placements, and volunteers, providing opportunities for skills- and general professional development within their communities to improve pathways into work; ● Working along clearly defined charitable objectives and social outcomes which they monitor and annually report on;

	<p><u>Illustrative example of trusts' work:</u> Newport Live is keen to support people who are committed to pursuing a career in theatre or within the Arts sector at the Riverfront Theatre and Arts Centre. To support the effective development of this support, they have a dedicated creative experience policy for work placements. This policy clearly indicates that "All students are good enough to have a placement" - creating opportunities for anyone interested to apply for a work placement regardless of their background.</p>
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1. Our Response to: A *current* issue you care about

Having illustrated how member trusts play their part as community anchor organisations, we can now describe and understand how current issues impact their work, and, consequently, restrict their contribution to the Wellbeing Goals. There are four current issues that we welcome raising in this conversation.

Enabling engagement for all

Trusts see their role as enabling those in greatest need to be involved and engaged in something positive and have opportunities to be active.

Trusts generally are concerned about the health of their communities and aim to increase activity levels of specifically those who are inactive to prevent or manage long-term health conditions, improve mental health and to reduce social isolation. These outcomes will help to build resilient communities across Wales – improving their social outcomes through involvement and participating, reducing health inequalities and building the local and national economy. To achieve these outcomes for future generations, the foundation building blocks need to be developed and cemented now.

One trust specifically refocused their strategy to prioritise enabling and engaging children into activity. This was driven by their concern with local children's activity levels and engagement in leisure and cultural activities.

It is through the desire to enable engagement for all, for example, that trusts like Halo Leisure have launched Dementia Friendly Swimming as the number of people living with dementia in Bridgend County is anticipated to grow to over 3000 by 2030. By working together with local authorities and bringing together a partnership of adult social care, health trainers, carers and local community groups, the programme creates a safe and friendly swimming environment for people with dementia and their carers. Other trusts have started similar dementia friendly programmes such as choirs and arts- and craft activities. These programmes offer a moment of relief for carers and supports their (mental) wellbeing while also being a moment of reminiscence and creating more access to sport and cultural activity for people with dementia.

Yet, increasingly we see that policy decisions impact the ability for trusts to truly be accessible to everyone. In particular, the recent 50% budget cuts to the free swimming initiative worries us. The almost non-existent national media coverage and ownership of these changes worries us even more as trusts and their local authority partners were left to explain the changes to their customers and local media. There was no national, public scrutiny that one would expect with such a major policy decision. This lack of response or accountability makes us wonder what will be next? Will this, for example, lead to a further reduction in preventative care delivered through sport and physical activity through the National Exercise Referral Scheme programme? If we continue to undervalue the positive impacts of sport and physical activity on not just our current but our future health, we are afraid that other significant policy decisions will be made without full and proper consideration of the wider consequences.

In addition, while trusts work hard to be accessible to all, the reality of operating in rural, sparsely populated areas or areas with fewer public transport connections makes it more difficult for people to

access their local leisure and cultural facilities. We know that this impacts the most disadvantaged of our society the most, and, will, in turn widen health inequalities. With the reduction in free swimming funding, for example, comes an irregular, week-to-week schedule of free classes for older people, which means that they not only lose their regular exercise class but combined with limited transportation will make it harder, if not impossible, to go for a swim, and, importantly, stay around for the important chat and cuppa.

For these reasons, the increasing trend of reduced funding for sport, physical activity and cultural activities (look, for example, at the significant cuts made to library services) is a worrisome trend, and one we feel needs to be addressed.

Oversight of and care for public leisure services

Across the UK, public leisure services are not politically and strategically 'owned'. Wales has the opportunity to be different and could take ownership and care for public leisure and cultural services and facilities. This is not about controlling, shaping a marketplace, or determining its future; but caring for those services, seeing their value, advocating for their role, and critically supporting local authorities to value those services and flip the worrying current trend (described below) into a positive trend of collaboration, partnership, shared outcomes and being community focused for the future.

We've seen the emergence of trusts (c. 10 years ago in the main) delivering leisure services and increasingly cultural services, some local authorities retaining delivery of those services (often called 'inhouse'), and now increasingly in Wales in particular, the implementation of Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCs) created through the teckal exemption to deliver leisure services.

It is the *reasons behind* establishing a LATC (rather than retaining the services inhouse or forming a truly independent charitable trust) that is our concern. This change in delivery model is a current issue, as in our view, sometimes LATCs are established because of concerns based on risk, fear, misunderstanding of models, and being driven by pure cost savings. They are not the reasons to choose a delivery option. The model for delivery should be decided by: *what do our communities most need? Who are our public leisure and culture services for? What objectives and outcomes are we trying to achieve? How do we balance cost efficiency and effective delivery?*

Trusts, on the other hand, all work with defined charitable objectives which they annually report on. Being rooted in their communities, trusts are able to pick up on community needs as and when they arise and, being independent, can make agile decisions in response to those needs. Their charitable purpose and identity come before profit, as one member quite powerfully described as: *"A Trust will align itself with the [cultural] strategy of the local authority putting purpose before profit. The Trust will actively seek ways to engage with stakeholders and the community. Profit is a by-product of this collaboration and not the reason for it."*

Yet, we notice that local and national representatives have little understanding of the trust model and more often than not, do not consider the trust model when rethinking how they can best deliver quality leisure and culture activities for their communities. Therefore, we welcome having an open conversation about the different type of delivery models for public culture and leisure, and we *strongly support* the Commissioner's view in her Annual Report 2018-2019 that *"procurement policy and practice have not kept up with the new requirements under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the extent to which Welsh Government and public bodies are developing contracts informed by the five ways of working and seven well-being goals is not clear."*

Environmental crisis

Trusts recognise their responsibility with supporting the environmental crisis and are actively seeking ways to reduce / change usage, improve reporting, improve efficiencies and change behaviours of staff. The challenge is the ability to raise capital to invest in technology or equipment or appliances to realise those efficiencies or needed changes. Because trusts reinvest all surpluses and are registered charities, they are unable to retain significant capital reserves at this level for investment. It would be positive if there was an opportunity of a grant or social investment loan scheme to help organisations like member trusts, to have access to capital to make the investments needed e.g. purchasing new

boilers, CHP units both examples are c. £250,00 but pay back over c. seven years. Perhaps the WLGA or Sport Wales could seek to scope such a capital scheme to help trusts (and others) invest in energy efficient capital expenditure now, to support the future?

Recognising trusts as significant contributors

As articulated above, public leisure and culture trusts are significant contributors across national and local government policy and objectives, and importantly, positively impacts upon community wellbeing and local economies. As mentioned in the introduction of this response, trusts welcomed a combined 27 million visits in 2018. Yet their significant contributions to community development and wellbeing are not recognised, nor is their impact as much considered in policy development as it should be.

Trusts are seen as a 'caretaker of facilities' who open the library at 8am, and close it at 6pm. Their development role, their capacity building of local VCSE organisations, their commitment to their locality, and their closeness to their communities, can go unnoticed. Trusts are far more than caretakers.

The challenge is trusts being recognised as significant, positive and present partners across national development agencies, national government and the Commissioner. Trusts can be bypassed in discussions as the communications are directed at local authorities, when instead the services are delivered by an independent charitable trust who wants to support, be engaged and contribute.

We would welcome either trusts individually or Community Leisure UK as representing the collective of trusts, are welcomed, involved and included in policy discussions and developments. Both ourselves and the trusts individually have a vast amount of expertise, experience and insight that we are keen and able to share. Community Leisure UK sits in a unique birds-eye position where we can see across the UK the challenges, opportunities and solutions for public leisure and cultural services; we all want to share these and support across multiple policy areas in Wales.

2. Our Response to: The difference you would like to see in the future regarding the current issues

There are two positive differences we would like to see:

1. Local authorities are supported to help understand, care for, and help build resilient public leisure and culture services. To be *resilient and sustainable*
 - a. Contracts (if the services are delivered in partnership with a charitable trust) are built on collaboration, outcomes-based, shared risk, open book accounting, commissioned rather than procured, balance cost effectiveness and cost efficiency, and importantly we move away from turning leisure in Wales, into a potential race to the bottom;
 - b. Trusts can diversify and develop their own programmes, services and activities to best meet the needs of their communities. Trusts can make quick, agile decisions, and implement them straightaway;
 - c. Local authorities support trusts in their recognition of the environmental crisis and making public assets future proof;
 - d. Local authorities work in partnership and collaboratively with the trust and not assert control or power which can stifle the trust and potentially break charity law;
 - e. The Commissioner can champion commissioning services rather than procurement driven by lowest cost.
2. The Commissioner *values and champions* the role of public leisure and culture across Welsh policy and decision makers, as significant contributors to their objectives
 - a. Public leisure and culture services and trusts are able to contribute, be involved, be invited into conversations at national and regional levels;
 - b. The Commissioner encourages national and regional funding to be made available for the development of sustainable programming aimed at preventative care through sport and cultural activities, including but not limited to, free swimming, NERS, social prescribing and locally developed programmes based on clearly identified understanding of community needs;

- c. The Commissioner encourages other policy makers and decision makers to involve their leisure and culture services across public health, transport, regional economic discussions and planning, adult social care, high street redevelopments and regeneration etc.

3. Our Response to: A *future* challenge/concern you identify

With regards to future challenges with a public leisure and culture lens, and future generations, there are two we would welcome raising.

Infrastructure investment

Often public leisure and culture facilities are some of the last remaining community buildings, open and retained for public use. Equally as often, they are aging facilities and in need of investment particularly if they are heritage buildings or have not received the continued investment and maintenance as required. We are concerned about the future of those buildings being there and accessible for future generations to access, enjoy and retain for their future generations. Equally, we are concerned about the current trend of worsening building conditions which are already impacting on the quality and accessibility of the cultural and sport programmes delivered.

Trusts have maintenance plans and lifecycle plans for their facilities, and these will be discussed with their local authority partner. However, the access to capital is limited. There are options available to draw down capital: prudential borrowing through the local authority although we hear this is reducing and with the Public Works Loan Board recently increasing borrowing rates for local authorities, this is challenging; high street bank loans which is commonly used by trusts; social investment but often the loan rates are higher and the conditions are stifling.

Capital investment is needed, and this undoubtedly links to the challenge raised above on the need for capital investment to support the environmental emergency.

An increasing trend in leisure contracting

As noted above in the differences we would want to see section, our future concern is that public leisure in Wales starts following trends in England, and now Scotland with regards to procurement practice and handling of contracts.

Our evidence-based concern is that leisure will be trimmed down to meet a financial expectation for the local authority based on cheapest cost or highest profit share, which is often an expectation falsely set by leisure consultants.

If Wales follows the English trend, our grave concern is that the services most needed by communities will be cut because they are unaffordable to run. This could include losing outreach community services, community hubs delivered to engage young people, walking groups, library services, arts programmes etc. In our view, this is not what public leisure and culture services should be.

We cannot allow leisure to be turned into a commodity, we must ensure that leisure (and cultural) services remain for all future generations and are developed and supported to engage the communities in most need, not just those that can afford to pay.

4. The difference you would like to see in the future

There are five differences that we would welcome for the future:

- The Commissioner to formally recognise charitable trusts in their Our Future Wales report as important local partners and contributors to achieving the Well-being Goals;
- The Commissioner to encourage national and regional funding to be made available for the sustainable investment in our public leisure and cultural facilities so that they can continue to be used as an anchor institution within local communities where quality programmes are delivered and are accessible to all, that they will be future proof, and can be enjoyed by future generations;
- Wales is proud of their leisure and culture services, and government and policy makers publicly promote those services.
- Public leisure and culture services in Wales are resilient, because local and national policy maker have been proactive in supporting and protecting those services for everyone in the community to access.
- Leisure and culture trusts are actively contributing to highlighting, celebrating and showcasing Wales.

Final comments

Thank you for opening this conversation and welcoming submissions from diverse organisations and individuals. This feels a genuine, open process, and we thank the Commissioner's Office for that.

We care passionately about public leisure and culture services, the true abilities of the trust model, and the cross-policy outcomes delivered. Our role is to support the much-needed trust sector and ensure that the voice of trusts is heard and shine a spotlight on their abilities. Our submission may appear challenging in parts, but this is because with leisure and culture, we are at a turning point. The Commissioner and wider partners can play a fundamental role in ensuring that the public leisure and culture sector turns in the direction that leads to improved community outcomes, economic resilience, reducing health inequalities and fun opportunities for all.

Both Community Leisure UK and individual trusts are willing, present and positive partners to work alongside. However, we need support in helping us to be able to make this contribution nationally and locally.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our response. We look forward to the conclusions of the Our Future Wales Report and engaging our members in them. If we can provide any further information or perspectives, or if you have any questions please do contact myself on the email or telephone below.

Yours faithfully,



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