



Dafydd Elis-Thomas, MS
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
Via email

1 March 2021

Dear Deputy Minister,

As Welsh Government is preparing the pandemic recovery plans and the careful lifting of current lockdown restrictions, there are three actions we ask you to consider to support charitable trusts and the public leisure and culture sector.

Like all other sectors, public leisure and culture have been significantly hit by the pandemic. With reserves plummeting and costs increasing, it is thanks to a combination of the support of local authorities, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, investment through sector-specific funding and the ability for leisure trusts to access the Hardship Fund for local authorities that they managed to stabilise their financial position.

Leisure and culture trusts will require continued support into the new financial year so they can continue to fulfil their role as community anchor organisations. We therefore ask Welsh Government to continue their much-welcomed support to the public leisure and culture sector, by considering our three asks as outlined below.

1. Continue sector specific funding packages

We welcome the continuation of the Hardship Fund, which has significantly supported Local Authorities and charitable trusts. In addition, we would welcome a second round of the sector specific funding provided through Sport Wales (Sport Resilience Fund) and the Arts Council of Wales (Arts Resilience Fund, Culture Recovery Fund). Sector-specific funding would complement the Hardship Fund by focusing specifically on rethinking delivery of activities and adapting business models to the changed landscape. This will allow organisations to reopen and restart facilities and activities – when national restrictions allow – for all ages and abilities, increasing access to leisure and culture.

We further request that when this second round of sector-specific funding is confirmed that Welsh Government and the national bodies work with the sector to make the Fund accessible to charitable trusts. We have welcomed the close collaboration between Community Leisure UK and Sport Wales, and the consequent inclusion of a Local Authority and Leisure Trust strand within the Sport Resilience Fund. On the arts and culture side, however, we know that the application form for the Culture Recovery Fund made it more difficult for organisations, including charitable trusts, to apply, making funding less accessible to those who need it.

2. Publicly support safety measures put in place by leisure and culture

Leisure and culture facilities have put extensive precautions in place to enable a safe reopening when national restrictions allow, including, amongst other, physical distancing routes, controlled access through bookable slots, ventilation, and strict cleaning regimes.

We request that Ministers keep these adapted circumstances in mind when discussing, both publicly and internally, the risks within our sector. Experiences from last summer show that when facilities reopened – where allowed to do so – consumer confidence remained lower than anticipated. Therefore, we call on Welsh Government to publicly support and recognise the safety measures put in place.

3. Provide a timeline for reopening

We are conscious and appreciate that confirming a timeline for reopening and moving through the different levels of restrictions is incredibly difficult. However, an indication of how Wales will move through the different levels, with indicative dates, would support organisations in their business planning.

In addition, we ask you to rethink the position of theatres and performing arts venues in the Levels of reopening, so that participatory arts activities and rehearsals can take place, even when performances are not yet permitted.

Throughout the pandemic, charitable trusts significantly contributed to the Covid-19 response. They transformed a leisure centre into a field hospital¹, facilitated the launch of a new service in Newport to help Covid patients recover², encouraged creative activities to support mental health and wellbeing of the elderly³, transformed leisure sites into mass Covid-19 testing centres⁴, and, later on, transformed those same facilities into mass Covid-19 vaccination centres⁵.

Trusts across leisure and culture are ready to continue this important health and wellbeing work coming out of lockdown and to reinforce their position as valuable partners.

We thank you for your time and consideration, and are grateful for your continued support to the public leisure and culture sector. If there are any further insights needed from the sector that would support Welsh Government in undertaking these actions, we would be more than happy to provide them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Huygen'.

Jennifer Huygen

Engagement & Policy Manager
Wales Lead for Community Leisure UK

¹ aura.wales/2020/04/02/deeside-leisure-centre-to-become-north-wales-third-temporary-hospital-for-covid-19-patients

² channel4.com/news/new-service-launched-in-newport-to-help-covid-patients-recover

³ newsfromwales.co.uk/news/dont-feel-trapped-at-home-get-creative

⁴ merthyr.gov.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/merthyr-tydfil-to-be-first-whole-area-testing-pilot-in-wales

⁵ twitter.com/AneurinBevanUHB/status/1340673661574012930?s=09