

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State
Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

07 June 2020

Dear Mr Dowden

RE: FUTURE OF SWIMMING POOLS

We are writing to request a meeting as a matter of urgency to discuss the uncertain future facing many swimming pools, to highlight the additional support required to prevent hundreds of pools from being unable to reopen and urge you to work with colleagues at MHCLG to ensure an immediate request is made to Treasury so that funding is available to allow pools to reopen when the Government announces the next phase of relaxations.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has rightly championed the importance of physical activity, this is a sentiment we wholeheartedly support. Additionally, schemes like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme have been welcomed, and extensively utilised, by the sector.

Many operators are having to adjust to losing 100% of their income as a result of the closure of swimming pools and are now at crisis point as a result of this loss of income and limited cash reserves. In addition, many swimming pool operators still have high costs, particularly fixed costs. For instance the average monthly leisure utility and energy bill is £44,000. Furthermore, swimming pool operators, particularly Leisure Trusts, are currently falling between the cracks of most announced support packages.

Before the lockdown 14 million adults in England went swimming in the last year, making it one of the most popular activities. Swimming pools provide hubs of physical activity in communities up and down the country, generating huge social value for these areas. A single 25m pool can generate £7.2 million social value in community savings and save the NHS and social care system more than £1.2 million.

We recognise that discussions are underway between DCMS, MHCLG and Sport England, UK Active and CLUK around leisure centre, pool and gym funding and we would add our voice to re-emphasize the urgency of the situation.

Signatories to this letter own or operate over 750 of the 1,858 pools in England that are owned by local authorities, community organisations, sports clubs or commercial enterprises and have been pleased to work with the department on guidance for the reopening of pools. Without substantial additional financial support however, there is a real danger that even when pools are allowed to reopen many hundreds of them, including the majority of pools in public sector ownership, will not be able to do so due to financial pressures as a result of the closures and the cost of bringing the pool out of lockdown.

We know that swimming improves people's physical and mental wellbeing, supports community cohesion and saves the NHS hundreds of millions of pounds each year. Swimming can tackle a number of the problems facing society, particularly at the moment, in a way that other sports cannot, with people of all ages able to enjoy them.

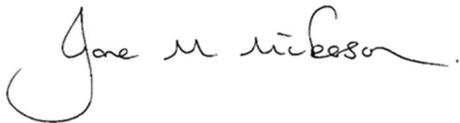
For some, they are the only appropriate environment that enables them to be active and transform their lives. The closure of swimming pools would therefore compound the widening inequalities we are witnessing as a consequence of the pandemic.

It is therefore vital that we ensure people still have access to these facilities in the future. To that end we would be most grateful if you were able to meet with the sector to discuss the specific issues facing swimming pools and the additional support required to support the sector, and the 67,000 people employed within it. We would also ask that, in conjunction with MHCLG, an immediate request is made to Treasury so that funding is available to allow pools to reopen when the government announces the next phase of relaxations.

If so, our Head of Public Affairs, Philip Brownlie (Philip.brownlie@swimming.org) would be happy to make the necessary arrangements with your office.

We are writing in similar terms to your colleague the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP.

Yours sincerely



Jane M Nickerson – Chief Executive, Swim England
David Bibby - Managing Director, Everyone Active
Alex Godfrey – Operations Director, Parkwood Leisure
Andrew Clark – National Sports and Aquatics Manager, GLL
Peter Kay – Chief Executive, Fusion Lifestyle
Mark Haslam – Head of Sport, Places Leisure
John Wileman - Head of Sport, Leisure and Business Management, Nottingham City Council
Tim Nightingale – Chief Executive, 1610
Mark Tweedie – Chief Executive, Community Leisure UK
Kieran Charles - Sports Facilities Business Manager, Tendring District Council
Andrew Snelling – Chief Executive, Sheffield City Trust/SIV
Simon Ferrarelli – Corporate Manager, Barnsley Premier Leisure
Geoff Wade - Active Communities Officer (Aquatics), GO Gateshead Sports and Leisure
Lisa Wainwright – Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance

1610

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