

Comprehensive Spending Review Submission

Executive Summary

As part of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) consultation, Community Leisure UK has submitted a representation calling for progressive policy developments, including making sport and leisure a statutory duty for all councils in order to better support the health and wellbeing of the population and, alongside this, investment to:

1. Prevent the permanent closure of public leisure and cultural facilities essential to supporting the long-term health and wellbeing of local communities and to build back better throughout the COVID-19 recovery period.
2. Deliver a national campaign to promote the benefits of leisure and culture, and at the same time to build public confidence and raise realistic expectations about fully engaging with reopened leisure and cultural venues.
3. Enable councils, in partnership with their service providers, to redesign, upgrade and renovate leisure and cultural facilities to the standard needed to support healthy, active communities, and in doing so realise the opportunity to transform leisure facilities into community wellbeing hubs offering colocated and integrated services.
4. Produce a bold and brave new vision, national strategy and delivery framework for leisure and culture leading to the creation of a national wellness service aimed at significantly reducing rising demands on NHS and social services. Community Leisure UK envisage such a service could include the following delivered in leisure and cultural settings and their surrounding communities;
 - integrated health and wellbeing services focused on improving physical and mental health, including the entitlement for everyone with a long-term health condition to receive a "wellness prescription" to help manage their condition(s);
 - integrated disability, social care and youth services focused on improving physical and mental health, educational attainment, routes to employment and crime reduction; and
 - a leisure and culture volunteering scheme to build social capital to support community outreach work to engage population groups who do not benefit from being physically active and being part of a community.
5. Protect essential jobs that remain at risk because of service viability due to physical distancing measures, and staffing cost inflation arising from anticipated National Living Wage increases.
6. Develop more Cultural Compacts to help drive and revive the cultural sector and in turn the economy, and develop public library Makerspaces with more access to computers.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Community Leisure UK (CLUK) welcomes the opportunity to participate in this consultation to assist the government to consider its priorities across all spending over multiple years. This submission provides policy proposals, explaining the desired outcome across public policy priorities in terms of health improvement, recovery from COVID-19 and efficient investment to reduce future costs. We outline the policy rationale in relation to the achievement of the following government priorities.

- **Recovery from COVID-19 by prioritising jobs and skills.**
- **Levelling up economic opportunity by investing in infrastructure, innovation and people.**
- **Improving outcomes in public services, including supporting the NHS and taking steps to cut crime and ensure every young person receives a superb education.**

2. About Community Leisure UK

2.1. CLUK is a members' association representing registered charities, societies or community interest companies with a public benefit asset lock (Trusts) delivering public leisure, sport and/or arts and culture services for communities across the UK. Trusts provide physical activity, cultural engagement and social opportunities and are significant partners within their local communities.

2.2. CLUK has 110 member Trusts, operating over 3,700 facilities, including: over 380 libraries, 835 outdoor sports courts and pitches, 66 theatres, 780 leisure centres, 104 parks, and 224 community and town halls. Members range from small Trusts operating one or two facilities, to larger Trusts operating in multiple geographical locations. Members employ over 46,000 staff (the majority aged 18-34) and engage over 17,000 volunteers across a range of leisure and cultural services. Across the CLUK membership, 58 per cent of Trusts deliver cultural services and facilities, which equates to 1,100 cultural assets (i.e. theatres, town halls, libraries, museums, cinemas etc.).

2.3. Last year members received over 233 million customer visits, generating a combined turnover more than £1.2 billion, including financial support from local authority partners of £202 million. Trusts play a major and distinctive role in the national delivery of vital local services and CLUK works closely with its members and many national

bodies to assist this role and support best practice. Significantly, the collective social value for our members is £1.5 billion.

3. Current Situation for Trusts and the wider Leisure and Cultural Sector

- 3.1. Like many other sectors, public leisure and culture has been hit hard by the impact of COVID-19. During lockdown, Trusts used various financial levers to cover their costs including using their full reserves, arranging bank overdrafts, applying for government backed loans and requesting payment holidays. Without financial support the sector will only have 10 per cent of reserves remaining by the end of the current financial year. This means most Trusts will have insufficient working capital to operate. If there is a second (local) lockdown requiring businesses to close, Trusts will have no reserves to rely on and it is unlikely they would be able to remain solvent. In addition, as the anticipated recovery period for our members is 12-18 months after reopening, and longer for those with cultural facilities, there will be no reserves available to support Trusts as they seek to regrow and rebuild their businesses.
- 3.2. Most leisure income comes from health and fitness membership subscriptions and income from customers (e.g. bookings, entry fees, hall hire etc.). Income for cultural services typically comes from admission fees, grants, donations and gift aid, and commercial activities (e.g. cafes, hospitality etc). With the closure of most facilities since 23 March 2020, and with a limited customer return upon reopening late July, income ceased with immediate effect and has been significantly slow to resume, which has had a serious impact on the financial sustainability of the public leisure and culture sectors.
- 3.3. Despite the various financial support streams established to support businesses, there are serious shortfalls to ensure all non-profit-distributing organisations survive this situation in the short and medium term. Trusts have continued to fall through the gaps in funding as per the below, with the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) as the main support mechanism.
- 3.4. Without financial support for the sector, the workforce will be severely impacted. Currently 26 per cent of the contracted workforce (circa 7,000 jobs), and 50 per cent of the casual workforce (circa 9,000 jobs) are at risk. This is in addition to over 6,000 contracted and casual staff already confirmed for redundancy or, in the case of casual workers, not offered work. This disproportionately affects the workforce in the 18-34 age bracket as Trusts are some of the biggest employers for this age group. It would therefore exacerbate the already stark and rising unemployment figures for younger people. It is anticipated that these numbers will rise sharply as reopening progresses, due to higher operating costs, and the impacts of physical distancing and customer confidence decimating income levels. Both the leisure and culture sectors have a high dependency on casual workers and the loss of these individuals will impact on the

recovery going forward, as well as a significant loss of skills and knowledge, which may never return.

- 3.5. While the majority of leisure and cultural facilities have reopened, although many have not, they did so with a significantly reduced offer of services (for example, limited resumption of exercise referral, social prescribing, and youth or dementia-friendly activities), primarily to manage financial viability risks. Theatres are of particular concern as many will be unable to reopen before spring 2021, far beyond the end of the furlough scheme and having missed a significant season for theatre. Limited reopening and uncertainties going forward is negatively impacting upon community and club access, with reduced capacity and hours available. Inevitably most Trusts have had to make the difficult choice to focus on commercial income as an immediate priority to ensure business survival, with charitable work, often cross-subsidised through income generating activities, being at best delayed or at worst compromised for the foreseeable future.
- 3.6. To date, there has been no financial support provided for the leisure sector, and funding for the arts and culture sector will not be enough to support the long recovery period ahead. This highlights a lack of understanding by the government of the real and frightening risks to the sectors; identified in this submission. It demonstrates a distinct lack of recognition for the value, contribution and potential of public leisure and culture to further support the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the nation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.7. CLUK and ukactive have, and continue to urge the government to commit relief funding to enable the full reopening and recovery of the public leisure sector in particular, accounting for the catastrophic impact of COVID-19. Relief funding is required to stabilise the sector and to use the time to develop and implement a sustainability plan. Without relief funding we estimate a third of all public leisure facilities in the UK will not reopen and half will face permanent closure.
- 3.8. In addition to the evident impact on local economies and jobs, to lose these valuable leisure and cultural services feels detrimental to current government policy: leisure and culture venues support the health and wellbeing of our society and therefore will play an important role in enabling the new obesity strategy and helping tackle diabetes and mental illness. To reduce access to health and wellbeing services during a health pandemic is counterproductive and could ultimately cost both more lives and money.

4. Looking Ahead for Trusts and the wider Leisure and Cultural Sector

- 4.1. The performance of the sector to respond quickly and effectively to pave the way for recovery has been remarkable. The sector has;

- redeployed people and repurposed facilities to provide local area COVID-19 community response hubs;
- pivoted to provide engaging digital and outdoor offers during lockdown, including specialist intervention services such as the GM Active [Prehab4Cancer](#) service, and Magna Vitae's [online arts sessions](#);
- worked collaboratively to develop robust technical guidance and training to enable COVID-19 secure reopening, and reopened facilities for communities promptly, whilst going to extraordinary lengths to minimise net costs to manage viability risks; and
- committed to protecting and supporting the workforce, in many cases by topping up the furlough payment and by providing redeployment and further professional development opportunities.

4.2. This demonstrates the potential of the sector to play a much bigger role as part of a combined public service effort to improve the nation's health and wellbeing. CLUK is very concerned about the widening inequality gap during the lockdown period, the likelihood that the hidden costs to communities will be felt for decades and, in the long run, dramatically increase pressure on already stretched NHS and social service budgets.

4.3. As previously outlined, the public leisure and culture landscape will be in a fragile position for a significant period. There is a high risk of facilities closing permanently because of financial pressures leading to rationalisation.

4.4. Coupled with new trends and changes in customers' routines, it is likely that the landscape will never return to the pre-COVID-19 normal. However, this offers an incredible opportunity to rethink the function and value of public leisure and culture to build back better. Ultimately, it is a chance to harness the incredible potential of leisure and culture assets to impact on wider national and local priorities.

5. Leisure and Culture Sector Opportunities

5.1. Investing in public leisure and cultural services to enable self-sustaining provision by upgrading facilities and introducing standardised services that deliver an evidenced based health and social return on investment will assist councils to mitigate their increasing budget pressures, first manifested by austerity and now as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The Local Government Association (LGA) reports that local councils have incurred £4.8 billion of extra cost pressures and income losses because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the £3.2 billion of COVID-19 emergency funding provided by the government to local councils has reduced some immediate pressures, councils are still facing an overall funding gap of £7.4 billion.

- 5.2. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of many chronic conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions. This is why the government's manifesto commitments to investing in the future of leisure and sports facilities to ensure communities can be active and at the same time investing in the future wellbeing of the nation.
- 5.3. Commissioned by Sport England, the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University [reported](#) the social impact and economic importance of sport and physical activity in England. They determined that for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity nearly £4 is generated for the economy and society. The findings demonstrate that investment creates a return across health and social care, improves wellbeing, builds stronger communities and develops skills in the economy. The findings also reveal that community sport and physical activity brings an annual contribution of £85.5 billion to the country (in 2018 prices) through social and economic benefits. Its social value, including physical and mental health, wellbeing, individual and community development is more than £72 billion, provided via routes such as a healthier population, consumer expenditure, greater work productivity, improved education attainment, reduced crime and stronger communities. Sport England also commissioned research into the costs of physical inactivity, which showed that NHS providers in England spent more than £900 million in 2009/10 treating people with diseases that could be prevented if more people were physically active.
- 5.4. We also [know](#) that in 2018, the creative industries (including arts and culture) contributed more than £111 billion to the UK economy, equivalent to £306 million every day. With a 7.4 per cent increase on 2017, the creative industries were growing more than five times the national UK economy prior to the pandemic. Reports from [Arts Council England](#) indicate that cultural venues also support local employment, with over 300 cultural venues being located in local unemployment hotspots. Before COVID-19, the creative industries [employed over 2 million people](#), with 75 per cent outside of London, contributing to both urban and rural employment.
- 5.5. Research by [Wavehill](#) further suggests how arts and culture contribute to place shaping, and improves the health and wellbeing of our nation. They highlight the ability of arts and culture to build bridges between communities and play a role in facilitating reconciliation and understanding through a broadening of people's experiences. They also evidence how the arts play a crucial role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society and how arts and culture participation reduces crime levels. In addition, the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's have [reported](#) on the social impact of participation in culture and support the notion that the arts and culture are 'essential to health and wellbeing' throughout the health spectrum; covering both prevention and support to people living with long term conditions.

- 5.6. By recognising the potential of leisure and culture to impact upon the wider determinants of health and by applying the principles of health and wellbeing economics to policy development and funding arrangements, long term savings could be achieved. This would not only position public leisure and culture as a credible accountable service sector but it would also represent a shift in the notions of funding public leisure and culture from funding it to survive to funding it to thrive over the long term.
- 5.7. By delivering public leisure and cultural services through a Trust, surplus revenue generated is reinvested into the local community the Trust serves, primarily to address inequalities. Trusts operate using a model that 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 activities will subsidise some health, community, library activities etc., and cross-subsidise access i.e. using income from those who can afford to pay, to support reduced cost or free activities for those with less disposable income.

6. Recovery from COVID-19 by prioritising jobs and skills.

- 6.1. The COVID-19 crisis has had a severe impact on the country's labour market, with the low paid and the young bearing the brunt of the impact. As stated earlier, this disproportionately affects the workforce in the 18-34 age bracket as Trusts are some of the biggest employers for this age group. With the end of the CJRS in October and with increased costs upon reopening, reduced income, and depleted reserves, redundancies are inevitable.
- 6.2. Over half of our member Trusts indicate that they have started discussions with their Trade Unions or will likely do so soon with regards to redundancy. This means a significant reduction of skilled, specialist and professional employees e.g. curators, health and exercise professionals, librarians, HR professionals etc. This presents a significant challenge: how can the sector and organisations rebuild, without those skilled and trained professionals.
- 6.3. Trusts are values based charitable organisations committed to providing the best possible terms and conditions of employment. However, 10 years of austerity driven financial constraints, now coupled with the impact of COVID-19, mean that in order to meet National Living Wage (NLW) requirements financial compromises need to be made across other areas of workforce expenditure. The situation is becoming increasingly unsustainable.
- 6.4. For the arts sector this is further exemplified through the impact of the cancellation of the panto season and the ongoing closure of theatres and performance venues which pose a significant threat to losing the skills required for the arts to flourish post-Covid-19. While these venues remain closed and with CJRS ending, workers will be forced to

seek other types of employment. All the while we know that culture drives footfall to our high streets and contributes to our local economies. For example, London's West End remains empty due to its closed theatres, impacting local businesses and restaurants who benefit from the secondary spending of visitors.

- 6.5. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and start to rebuild the economy, investing in employment and skills programmes that seek to address economic inequalities within and between communities will be paramount. The work of leisure and cultural services can support the delivery of the government's 'levelling up' agenda by optimising the fixed and human assets needed to tackle inequality and to improve the lives of people in deprived communities.
- 6.6. In particular, libraries play a critical role in supporting routes to employment as 17.3 million people in the UK lack the essential digital skills for life or work, which makes the provision of public access computers in libraries, and the support provided to train people in the skills to use them, more vital than ever. The business case developed by the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce, convened by DCMS and the LGA, demonstrated that [makerspaces](#) are a swift, cheap, and popular way of bringing creativity and innovation into communities that have previously had few creative outputs.
- 6.7. Central to achieving the ambitions cited in [Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#), was a competent and professional sport and physical activity workforce. Sporting Future tasked the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) with the responsibility to support the continuous development and professionalisation of the sector's workforce. However, recent policy decisions made by the Institute for Apprenticeships actively undermine the stated ambition of Sporting Future to support the sector develop an education delivery system that equips people with adequate skills to thrive. This includes failing to recognise sport and physical activity as a standalone strand in one of the seventeen new technical education routes for colleges, or T-Levels. This is despite other occupational areas of a similar size clearly being named (hairdressing, catering and hospitality). This decision, which drastically reduces the number of routes to train for a career in physical activity, is anticipated to severely limit the number of work-ready new professionals able to take up employment in the sector. This in turn limits the physical activity sector's ability to thrive and support the nation's economic recovery.

7. We are calling for:

- 7.1. An extension of the CJRS for facilities and services that for safety and viability reasons will need to remain closed under current physical distancing measures to protect against job losses and consequential skill deficits.
- 7.2. Funding to enable pay increases to be delivered in accordance with anticipated NLW rates (April 2021) to avoid exacerbating the already precarious financial position because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 7.3. Funding to develop a network of makerspaces and public access computers to turbocharge COVID-19 recovery to close the digital skills divide in the most deprived communities and support up and coming entrepreneurs and innovators (in line with the LGA).
- 7.4. Funding to develop more [Cultural Compacts](#) as supported by Arts Council England and as identified by the sector for the sector to help drive and revive the cultural sector and the local economy.
- 7.5. The government to recognise sport and physical activity as a standalone strand in one of the seventeen new technical education routes for colleges, or T-Levels (in line with ukactive and CIMSPA).

8. Levelling up economic opportunity by investing in infrastructure, innovation and people.

- 8.1. If leisure and cultural facilities are unable to reopen and remain viable, there will be a loss of Trust run facilities and services which are likely never to return. These facilities and services have a proportionally greater impact on more deprived communities and therefore not providing financial support will adversely impact upon the governments leveling up policies. Urgent investment is therefore required to protect the infrastructure to avoid severely exacerbating the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on deprived areas and communities.
- 8.2. Investment is needed in leisure facilities that are beyond their serviceable lifespan. The country's sporting infrastructure is ageing, with Sport England estimating that 63 per cent of main sports halls and 60 per cent of swimming pools are past their expected life spans or overdue refurbishment. This investment should be delivered by working with communities to design leisure centres, sports pitches and other infrastructure that will best meet their needs and enable them to build physical activity and health seeking behaviours into their lives. This could also mean realising the potential for new facilities to revitalise towns, be co-located with other facilities to form wellbeing or community hubs, and ensuring they meet the latest environmental standards for energy efficiency.
- 8.3. Sport England has been providing effective support and investment in infrastructure, but their funds are oversubscribed with over 1,000 bids submitted to a grant fund that could only make 151 grants. Had Sport England been able to fund those bids, it would have unlocked match funding worth at least £540 million from councils and partners. During its operation, the fund typically achieved a 30 per cent reduction in capital build cost and a 40 per cent improvement in efficiency averaging £500,000 per annum per facility.
- 8.4. There is a role for the government to support public leisure, sport, arts and culture operators in addressing the public perception of safety and managing expectations of how services and facilities are being delivered differently during the COVID-19

pandemic. This is influencing return rates of customers, which is in turn impacting on viability. The COVID-19 pandemic is the first time that national governments across the world have publicly recognised and highlighted the benefits of physical activity. This momentum needs to be harnessed and the positive messages need to translate into proactive policies that support operators of public leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services, recognising these activities as some of the wider determinants of health. In addition, there was a [600 per cent increase](#) in library memberships during lockdown and the National Theatre's At Home digital production gathered [more than 15 million viewers worldwide](#) which we need to build on, as the impact of artistic and cultural activities on mental health and wellbeing should not be forgotten about.

- 8.5. To unlock the sector's full potential, a clear focus on inclusive growth and investment in fixed and human assets must be at the heart of the government's spending plans. The provision of leisure and cultural facilities are crucial to people leading healthier lives and participating meaningfully in society and the economy. Trusts working with community groups are a vital component of a healthy social infrastructure, providing services and support networks for communities, including the most marginalised. However, COVID-19 has reduced the third sector's capacity to provide support to those most in need, and the sector needs support and investment to maximize its role in delivering against the government's objective of building a more inclusive economy.

9. We are calling for:

- 9.1. The government to make leisure and sport a statutory duty for all councils in order to better support the health and wellbeing of the population (in line with ukactive).
- 9.2. Ring-fenced emergency relief funding in the region of £800 million to support the public leisure sector through the current COVID-19 challenges so that the infrastructure can be protected and the sector can build back better. This will prevent the permanent closure of circa 48 per cent of the nation's public leisure facilities and support the long-term health and wellbeing of local communities (in line with ukactive).
- 9.3. Funding in the region of £500 million for councils to redesign, upgrade and renovate leisure facilities to the standard needed to support healthy, active communities and in doing so realise the opportunity to create community wellbeing hubs offering collocated and integrated services (in line with the LGA and ukactive).
- 9.4. Funding in the region of £100 million to convert disused retail units on the high streets into creative studios to enable creative industries to thrive and drive footfall to high streets by offering chance to grow entrepreneurs and innovators for the future by delivering 3d printing, coding and display spaces for creative experimentation (in line with the LGA). This must go hand in hand needed to curate high streets, as was done by [removing permitted development rights from theatres and performance venues](#), protecting them from inappropriate development and preserving them for the community.

9.5. A government led national campaign to promote the benefits of leisure and culture, and at the same time to build public confidence and raise realistic expectations about engaging with reopened leisure and cultural venues.

10. Improving outcomes in public services, including supporting the NHS and taking steps to cut crime and ensure every young person receives a superb education.

10.1. According to the ukactive report [Physical Activity - A Social Solution \(2017\)](#) the combined participation in public leisure is estimated to contribute £3.3 billion in social value to the UK economy. This figure considers improved health and wellbeing, reduced crime, increased educational attainment and improved life satisfaction. There is a unique opportunity to leverage the power of physical activity to support our recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and ensure the long-term sustainability of the NHS and social services. As identified in the ukactive report [Empowering communities: an assessment of capital investment into community wellness hubs](#), experts at the Academy of Royal Medical Colleges estimated that more than £18 billion headroom in the NHS national budget could be created if improvements were made to the way physical activity is offered in England.

10.2. Investment in the public leisure and culture sector to build back better with a new, bold and brave vision and a coordinated strategic approach will be the catalyst enabling the diverse sector to successfully unite to maximize its potential. A new approach can enable the sector to move on from historically ingrained barriers to collaboration and performance created by the variety of delivery models and the sometimes perverse consequences of competitive output focused procurement and contracts. Backed by government investment COVID-19 provides the stimulus for the sector to unite behind a new bold and brave vision and strategy that can release the untapped potential of the sector. This could be the birth of a national wellness service sitting alongside the nation's beloved NHS that can deliver more and better health and social outcomes for less, therefore achieving significant savings and better outcomes for the NHS, local councils and consequently the wider economy.

10.3. The opportunity is to reshape and extend leisure and culture services with a focus on person centred outcomes, delivered by more progressive integrated health, education and social service models. A new bold and brave vision set out in a new national strategy and delivery / evaluation framework for public leisure and culture, the essence of which is delivering a clear health and social purpose and maximizing efficiency and effectiveness through an integrated whole system approach is needed. A national framework would ensure all opportunities to deliver more and better outcomes at scale can be maximized, whilst also providing flexibility to ensure the scope and style of delivery meets the needs of localities. Managed through leisure and cultural service providers, and taking full advantage of the call for £500 million

investment to transform leisure centres into community wellness hubs and funding to develop more Cultural Compacts, this approach can help engage communities and people to rebuild social capital and provide services for those that need it most in the wake of COVID-19 in every locality of the country.

10.4. An integrated wellness service is characterised by a single point of access (i.e. leisure facilities or libraries becoming locality community wellness hubs) for the holistic assessment of individuals, triaging people based upon need and providing support to address the factors that influence their health and wellbeing and building their capability to be independent, resilient and maintain good wellbeing for themselves and those around them. Most communities have leisure and cultural facilities which is why they are well placed to become an efficient and effective local health and wellbeing lead. They can use new technologies easier and more convenient for users to deliver services with a holistic approach, focusing on wellness that address multiple needs, including the prevention and management of conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, mental health and musculoskeletal disorders rather than commissioning a plethora of single issue services. This represents a whole system approach with wellness at the centre, benchmarked against wellness service standards, and using an effective single referral process with pathways between other NHS and social services when relevant building on the NHS' Link Worker investment.

10.5. Good practice already exists which can be scaled under a national strategy and delivery framework. One such example is the [Active Tameside Everybody Can Service](#) for adults and young people who have specific needs or are engaged with the social care system, including special education and community sport and physical activity provision. This service has delivered substantial savings to the local council's health and social care budget, whilst also improving outcomes for service users, including health and wellbeing, developing independence, educational attainment and routes into employment. The [Abbeycroft Leisure Health and Wellbeing Service](#) provides typical exemplification of a programme that could be developed and scaled to form a national integrated wellness service. There are also powerful examples of leisure providers collaborating across sub regional areas to deliver early intervention and prevention services at scale, such as GM Active [Prehab4Cancer](#) programme (as stated earlier).

11. We are calling for:

11.1. Funding to enable the sector to produce a national strategy and delivery framework leading to the creation of a national wellness service that sits alongside the NHS. This will ease NHS and council financial pressures by reducing demands on health and social services (including by building resilience to COVID-19) and contribute to improved educational attainment and crime reduction. The service can be created efficiently and effectively by providing a coherent mechanism for scaling and quality assuring existing best practice. It could include;

- integrated health and wellbeing services focused on improving physical and mental health, including the entitlement for everyone with a long-term health condition to receive a “wellness prescription” to help manage their condition(s);
- colocated and integrated disability, social care and youth services within leisure and cultural settings focused on improving physical and mental health, routes to employment and crime reduction; and
- A national leisure and culture volunteering service to build social capital to support community outreach work to reach population groups who do not benefit from being physically active and part of a community.

12. Conclusion

12.1. The pre and post COVID-19 worlds of Trusts could not be more different. Pre COVID-19 many Trusts had plans for capital projects, developing services, deepening relationships with their local council partners and diversifying services. The outlook for public leisure and cultural services is bleak unless emergency relief funding is granted by government and CSR spending plans. This needs to include supporting the leisure and cultural sector to invest in fixed and human assets to deliver a wider range of efficient and effective services impacting on a wider range of public policy outcomes.

12.2. With significantly reduced resources in the public sector and leisure and culture being non-statutory public services (libraries being the exception) there is significant concern around the future. However, the sector has enormous potential and the CSR is an opportunity for the government to invest in the public leisure and culture sector to deliver a broader mandate, amongst widening health inequalities and increased demands on the health and social service systems. This way the government can justify the case for a greater share of scarce public capital and revenue expenditure on an invest to save basis.

12.3. This will pave the way for an investable national leisure strategy backed by government and national, regional and local partners including Community Leisure UK, ukactive, CIMSPA, sports governing bodies and national / regional sport and physical activity networks. Such a strategy can provide a much needed national vision for leisure with clear, common and accountable health and social outcomes, delivered via a new national framework with design and delivery flexibility to align with local context and priorities.