

## Public Leisure Provision for Community Benefit

As the national association for public leisure and culture trusts across the UK, Community Leisure UK was disappointed and surprised by the recent article published in the Local Government Chronicle [\*Insourcing of leisure centres accelerates as providers buckle under strain.\*](#)

At a time of incredible financial pressure across all sectors, leisure trusts have been working closely in partnership with their local authority partners to ensure the sustainability and viability of public leisure as we move into reopening. To suggest that Covid-19 has made the market no longer viable for some leisure trusts is entirely inaccurate and misleading.

Regardless of the operator model for public leisure, there is an unprecedented challenge to make ends meet. Insourcing will not alleviate financial pressures, but will instead incur immediate costs in transferring the service back to the Local Authority. In the longer term, the Local Authority would be faced with increased operational costs, including additional NNDR costs and increased employee costs, including access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Furthermore, we absolutely refute the idea that “local authorities have been handing money over during the pandemic to cover [leisure provider] losses and getting very little back”. Public leisure operators have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support their local communities. Whilst venues and facilities were forced to close, the outreach and support work continued, with a range of initiatives in collaboration with local partners. The pandemic [\*shone a spotlight\*](#) on the unique role of public leisure as a community anchor, working to support the wellbeing of everyone within their community. We should instead be celebrating that local authorities have recognised the important role of leisure and sought to support their local partners.

There is no doubt that the acute financial pressures on councils are significant, with a projected funding gap of £2.6 billion<sup>1</sup>, and savings required across a range of areas. The National Leisure Recovery Fund of £100m offered support to outsourced public leisure providers, which was not available to inhouse delivery models. This ring-fenced funding ensured that the money would reach leisure providers, providing vital support. In contrast, funding for local authority provision did not include ring-fencing for leisure.

As stated by the LGA, councils should “consider the long-term implications of these unprecedented times on the culture and leisure sector as a whole and consider how we can best stand together to ensure the resilience of these facilities for our residents.”<sup>2</sup>

We would suggest, therefore, that local authorities and their leisure trusts do stand together, and as we emerge from lockdown collectively focus on future delivery of public culture and leisure to meet the changing needs of the communities we serve. We would also ask for a more balanced article to be published in the Chronicle and we would be happy to provide evidence to support this.

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<sup>1</sup> LGA. *COVID-19: Opening gyms and public leisure facilities.* House of Commons. 22 March 2021. <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/covid-19-opening-gyms-and-public-leisure-facilities-house>

<sup>2</sup> LGA. *Options for councils in supporting leisure providers through COVID-19* <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Options%20for%20councils%20in%20supporting%20leisure%20providers%20through%20COVID-19%20WEB.pdf>