

## APSE Summer Roundtable – Local Authority Leisure

To: All English Authorities

For info: Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales

### 1. Context

Following the general election on the 4 July 2024 and the change in government, this roundtable session was convened for APSE Members with responsibility for local authority leisure, to examine the proposals set out in the Kings Speech and the potential impact on council leisure services.

This briefing provides a summary of the current position, and overview of the roundtable discussion, and outlines the key asks of the new government.

### 2. Current position

The incoming Labour administration has appointed two Northern MPs, the Rt Hon, Lisa Nandy MP as the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, supported by Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth, Stephanie Peacock MP. The original shadow secretary, Thangham Debonairre failed to win her Bristol seat.

The Minister outlined some of her priorities at the end of July including the statement:

*“Through our investment in grassroots sport and our determination that the legacy of the Paris Olympics and Euro 2024 is measured not just in trophies but in choices and chances for every child wherever they live and whatever their background.”*

### Kings Speech

Specific measures around local authority leisure were absent in the speech, however there were specific pledges on employment, devolution and infrastructure:

- **Employment Rights Bill:** *Introduce a new deal for working people to ban exploitative practices and enhance employment rights.*
- **English Devolution Bill:** *Legislation will be introduced to give new powers to metro mayors and combined authorities. This will support local growth plans that bring economic benefit to communities.*
- **Children’s Welfare Bill:** *A Bill will be introduced to raise standards in education and promote children’s wellbeing.*
- **Skills England Bill:** *“Skills England will work with industry, the Migration Advisory Committee, unions and the Industrial Strategy Council to build and maintain a comprehensive assessment of current and future skills needs. This will also inform the Department for Education’s policy priorities.”*

- **Terrorism (Protection of premises) Bill:** *“Measures will be introduced to improve the safety and security of public venues and help keep the British public safe from terrorism.”*

In addition there were specific sports related bills:

- **Football Governance Bill**
  1. Establishing a new independent regulator to address financial sustainability and ensure fans’ voices are heard.
  2. Introducing financial regulation to improve the financial resilience of clubs across the football pyramid.
  3. Creating a new, strengthened owners’ and directors’ test to make sure a club’s custodians are suitable and protect fans from irresponsible owners.
  4. Setting a minimum standard of fan engagement and requiring clubs to get fan approval to changes to the badge and home shirt colours, as well as placing the strong existing FA protections for club names on a statutory footing.

### **Sport England**

Sport England have highlighted work that is continuing across Government to “Strengthening the connections between sport, physical activity, health & wellbeing, so more people can feel the benefits of, & advocate for, an active”

They have emphasized 3 areas:

- Influence people working in the NHS and social care to prioritize physical activity to address health inequalities.
- Improve the pathway between health and organised activity by removing barriers associated with risk.
- Champion the role of sport & physical activity in supporting positive mental health and wellbeing.

They state “Our vision is to move from a current process of GP medical clearance required for people with health conditions to get active, through structured activity, that adds to bureaucracy and exacerbates inequalities to one of medical guidance. Whereby individuals with specific concerns about their symptoms can seek advice rather than clearance, to enable and empower them to best manage their condition and get active in ways that work for them”

### **3. APSE Comment**

Local authority leisure is struggling with rising costs and relies on significant amounts of casual labour and short-term contracts favored by some instructors. Whilst improved employment rights are welcomed, pay for some centre staff is not substantially above minimum wage so any increase will add to operational costs and centre viability. Combined with above inflationary increases in energy, the sector will struggle to deliver a service without subsidy if access for all is a priority. Swimming pools are especially vulnerable.

APSE's publication "[Securing the future of public sports and leisure services](#)" made several recommendations around inclusion of physical activity with a wellbeing /health agenda. There are encouraging signs from Sport England and NHS that this may be progressing along with supporting data collection from facilities.

The emphasis on children of school age and announcements on compulsory use of the National Curriculum within Academy schools may stimulate additional demand in swimming lessons which has been somewhat neglected over the past decade despite being a requirement. Currently all local authority-maintained primary schools must provide swimming and water safety instruction whereas the 42.7% of Primaries with an Academy structure are not bound.

Those same swimming pools require high levels of energy to heat and many are from the 1970's era or older. Substantial investment will be required to bring them to the efficiencies required to meet local authority net-zero targets. Without support from central government, this investment is unlikely to be plausible for most lower-tier councils.

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