

THE DEEP END

How to address Britain's swimming pool crisis



Public swimming pools are essential public infrastructure. They support physical activity, rehabilitation, community cohesion and the development of aquatic sports. They are also the main way many children learn a life-saving skill. Yet, the UK's pool network is under growing strain, and the current pattern of short-term intervention is insufficient to secure its future.

1,200+

pools have closed since 2010

2/3

of swimming facilities are beyond their expected lifespan

1/4

of local authorities lack the pool space their community needs

38%

of school age children from low-affluence families can swim

The challenge

Access to local swimming facilities is increasingly uneven, while ageing facilities are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain nationwide. Energy, maintenance, chemicals, insurance and staffing costs have all risen sharply. As a non-statutory service, leisure is frequently forced to compete with core spending priorities such as social care and education, making long-term planning and capital investment harder to sustain. Short-term rescue funding cannot address this structural problem.

Spending power in local authorities fell by

~1/4

in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20

Energy prices are nearly

DOUBLE

what they were five years ago

Wet centres can use up to

10X

more energy per m² than dry side gyms

The opportunity

Despite these challenges, a brighter future is possible through strategic investment and smarter design. Where investment is made in modern, well-designed leisure facilities, they prove more sustainable and deliver significantly improved returns. Reversing the decline also offers opportunities far beyond leisure. Swimming already helps to **save the health and social care system more than £357 million a year** by preventing thousands of cases of dementia, type 2 diabetes, and depression. Moreover, the public leisure sector is increasingly a key partner to the NHS, delivering vital prevention, pre-rehabilitation, and rehabilitation programmes.

Our recommendations

Without decisive national action, communities across the country stand to lose an essential part of their health, wellbeing, and water-safety infrastructure. By adopting the strategic plan outlined in this report, the government can secure the future of swimming and ensure this cherished activity continues to enrich the life of our nation.



1. **Deliver a National Strategy for Aquatic Facilities**



2. **Support modern, efficient and lower-carbon pool design**



3. **Guarantee swimming in education**



4. **Formalise the role of pools in public health delivery**