

**Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee**  
**Wednesday 28 January 2026**  
**3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)**

## **PE2018: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open**

### **Introduction**

<b>Petitioner</b>	Helen Plank on behalf of Scottish Swimming
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help keep our swimming pools and leisure centres open by providing financial investment for pools
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2018">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2018</a>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 7 May 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to seek a Chamber debate on the issues raised by this petition, and to write to the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Scottish Government, the Petitioner, Rachael Hamilton MSP and Beatrice Wishart MSP, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [The Chamber debate on this petition took place on 6 January 2026](#). On 15 January 2026, [the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care answered a General Question from Liz Smith MSP](#), regarding the Scottish Government's commitment, in the draft budget, to provide a universal offer of swimming tuition for primary school children in Scotland.
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 12 May 2023](#).
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 10,362 signatures have been received on this petition.

### **Action**

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**January 2026**

## Annexe A: Summary of petition

### PE2018: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

#### Petitioner

Helen Plank on behalf of Scottish Swimming

#### Date Lodged

12 April 2023

#### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help keep our swimming pools and leisure centres open by providing financial investment for pools.

#### Previous action

We have the support of Fulton MacGregor MSP in relation to this matter who has confirmed his support for swimming, swimming pools and this petition.

We are in dialogue with sportscotland, Community Leisure Scotland and local authority and Leisure Trust partners who have made us aware of the increased energy costs and issues affecting pools specifically.

At a parliamentary reception on 29 March 2023, we highlighted the value of swimming pools and the importance of pools for safety, for communities and for the mental and physical health of Scotland's population.

#### Background information

Swimming pools and leisure centres are under threat of closure. They are vital community hubs for the population of Scotland, not only as 'water safety classrooms' teaching children to swim, but for improving mental and physical wellbeing for all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

They support one of Scotland's most successful sports and, pre-pandemic, one of the nation's highest participation sports with 17% of the population swimming regularly in 2019.

Swimming pools host lessons for more than 100,000 children each week, as well as a variety of aquatic sports and water-based activities, all of which help keep the nation fit, healthy and active – an essential part of the nation's post-pandemic recovery.

A November 2022 report by [Community Leisure Scotland](#) found that an alarming 95% of their members are at financial risk with 63% in discussions and planning around the impact of facility closures. While this is across all facilities, pools are among those with highest operating costs and are especially vulnerable.

## Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2018 on 7 May 2025

**The Convener:** Our next petition is PE2018, lodged by Helen Plank on behalf of Scottish Swimming. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help to keep our swimming pools and leisure centres open by providing financial investment for pools.

We last considered the petition at our most recent meeting, on 23 April, when, as colleagues will recall, we heard evidence from a range of stakeholders involved with swimming programmes. They included coaches, those involved in developing and implementing programmes for swimming lessons and water safety across Scotland, and elite-level athletes, such as our most successful Scottish Olympian, Duncan Scott. Over the course of two round-table discussions, we explored the issue of swimming pools as community assets that can integrate with other services for the benefit of a wide range of users, such as young children learning to swim, which we pointed out is absolutely essential. We considered swimming pools as a gateway to other water-based activities and as supporting young people's and other people's mental and physical wellbeing.

We also discussed the potential impact of pool closures for general water safety and the risk of drowning, as well as for Scotland's ability to continue its excellent record of elite athletes competing at the highest international levels. We were struck by the fact that Scotland has the highest drowning rate of any of the nations in the United Kingdom.

There was support across both panels for the creation of a statutory duty to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn how to swim, ideally before they leave primary school, where, we heard, it is much more likely that that skill will be developed. At a later stage, peer group pressure and other factors can lead to children not properly learning how to swim. Participants spoke about the financial challenges of running swimming facilities and the need to consider smarter investment and a different way of doing things if we are to ensure access to good-quality swimming facilities at all levels. That included calls for a task force, made up of representatives from local authorities, leisure trusts, sportscotland, the Scottish Government and Scottish Swimming, to take a more joined-up and collaborative approach to finding solutions that would keep more pools open.

Over the past fortnight, we have all had an opportunity to consider the evidence that we have heard. I think that most, if not all, of us were struck by the fact that we pretty much thought that we could identify a common way forward. Would anybody like to make a suggestion?

**David Torrance:** In the light of the evidence that the committee has heard from stakeholders, which is pretty compelling, I wonder whether the committee would consider a chamber debate on the issue raised in the petition. I also wonder whether the committee would like to write to the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, to highlight the evidence that the committee has gathered and ask what consideration the Scottish Government has given to establishing a task force to explore solutions for keeping swimming pools open, including a statutory provision

that Scottish Swimming and sportscotland be consulted on all proposals for pool closures and replacements. We could ask whether the Scottish Government would consider introducing a statutory duty to ensure that every child in Scotland has the opportunity to learn to swim.

**The Convener:** Are members content with those suggestions?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We will write to the minister in the first instance, but we will seek to take the petition to a chamber debate before the end of the session—hopefully later in the year—given that there is an opportunity for the committee to take issues to the chamber. We have two or three issues that we are considering, but we might be able to address a couple of them in a single debate.

09:45

## Annexe C: Written submission

### Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport written submission, 29 May 2025

#### PE2018/P: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

Thank you for your letter of 9 May, requesting further information relating to the above petition.

As you will be aware, the Scottish Government believe that swimming pools are essential both in reducing the risk of and preventing drowning, and in providing an important facility to support physical and mental health.

Information is provided below on each of the questions you set out in your letter.

#### What consideration the Scottish Government has given to establishing a Task Force to explore solutions for keeping swimming pools open, including whether there should be statutory provision that Scottish Swimming and sportscotland are consulted on all proposals for pool closures and replacements.

A significant amount of work has already taken place, and is underway, to better understand the swimming pool estate and support investment in the right places. Scottish Swimming and sportscotland have published '*The Future of Swimming Facilities in Scotland*' which is a detailed research study into the condition of Scotland's swimming pools, as well as '*A Sustainable Future: Enhancing Energy Efficiency in Scotland's Swimming Pools*', which details how pool providers can improve energy efficiency in existing pools as well as new models for the next generation of carbon-efficient pools.

sportscotland regularly engages with local authorities and leisure trusts around the sports facilities estate and will continue to work with Scottish Swimming to explore the options that are available to strengthen the role they, and other organisations, can play in the planning for places for sport. Within this, consideration will be given to how best to support and protect swimming pools.

It is vital that key stakeholders work together to find collective solutions to ensure that investment, particularly at a time when public finances are under so much pressure, ensures sustainable facilities, in the right places, to serve local communities' needs.

#### Whether the Scottish Government will introduce a statutory duty to ensure every child in Scotland has the opportunity to learn to swim.

The Scottish Government believes that every child should be given the opportunity to learn to swim, it is a life skill that can save lives.

Under the provisions of Curriculum for Excellence, education authorities and individual schools themselves are best placed to decide the content of their lessons

at the local level, taking into account the local needs and priorities of all pupils in attendance at schools under their management.

There may be specific challenges for schools that do not offer swimming lessons as a part of their physical education classes, such as the distance required to travel to and from swimming pools being difficult to accommodate within the time slots allocated by a school's timetable.

Scottish Swimming's National Primary School Swimming Framework represents a significant step forward in the efforts to improve water safety and swimming education across Scotland. We are committed to continuing to work closely with all relevant organisations, to help ensure that every child in Scotland is given the opportunity to learn to swim.

## **Petitioner written submission, 21 January 2026**

### **PE2018/Q: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open**

Scottish Swimming welcomes the Scottish Government Budget Announcement to support school swimming with a multi-year funding commitment and would like to thank the Petitions Committee for the important part they have played in keeping school swimming high on the Government's agenda.

The issue of available, affordable and accessible swimming pools remains a real issue for Scotland and could even impact on the roll out of school swimming if solutions to the facilities crisis are not found. Pools are community hubs which play a major part in health and safety preventative measures for the benefit of the population.

At the start of 2026, seven pools have been in the news threatened with the prospect of closure. These include three school pools in Dundee which were under public consultation at the end of 2025; Jedburgh and Selkirk pools which remain under threat of permanent closure in the Borders; Scalloway pool in Shetland due to close in March 2026 and Port Glasgow pool in Inverclyde which is also part of a council consultation until February 9<sup>th</sup> 2026.

The situation is only likely to worsen as pools continue to age and increasingly fall into a state of disrepair. 122 of the public pools in Scotland (41%) are already over 38 years old which is the typical lifespan of a pool. The running costs of pools are placing spiralling cost pressures on local council budgets which is in turn causing councils to look at drastic cost saving measures through pool closures.

For these reasons Scottish Swimming is calling for:

- 1) A Task Force on swimming pools to explore investment needs and energy cost savings
- 2) Protection of pools as community assets through consultation on closures with Scottish Swimming and **sportscotland**

By setting up a joint task force between the Scottish Government, **sportscotland**, Scottish Swimming and COSLA we can start to assess and evaluate the risks and support needed to avoid pool closures. We can also plan for the future, establishing how cost savings can be made and how sustainability can be achieved.

A task force can assess and explore:

- ✓ Risks of pool closures at a national and local level
- ✓ Investment needed to sustain pool provision
- ✓ Models to exploit cost savings such as economies of scale on energy
- ✓ Future plans for facility new builds and renovations
- ✓ Carbon-efficient pools and sustainability

To achieve this we need collaboration between Government, **sportscotland**, COSLA and Scottish Swimming to join a task force aimed at supporting pool infrastructure and avoiding pool closures.

With regard to the protection of pools as community assets, our proposed solution is to make **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming statutory consultees at the earliest possible stage, when swimming pools are facing changes such as closure; relocation or opening. This would be similar to the consultation that schools go through when facing closure under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

By having a statutory consultation process **sportscotland** and Scottish Swimming could:

- ✓ Assess the impact on the local community
- ✓ Consider alternative solutions to closure
- ✓ Overlay age and location of other pools in the area
- ✓ Carry out a mapping exercise of all local pools
- ✓ Ensure greater understanding of the importance of pools

There is significant public demand and interest in swimming and wide public support for keeping pools open evidenced through the opinion poll by JL Partners previously shared. 95% of the Scottish Population think pools are important for safety and 91% think pools closures are bad for local communities. There is also cross party political support as demonstrated at the recent Members Debate in Parliament 6 January and through participation at a Hustings hosted by Scottish Swimming planned for 4 February 2026.

On a positive note it has been fantastic to see the opening of two Passivhaus pools at Blairgowrie and Currie High school using the latest technology and design to

create more sustainable, energy-efficient pools which is something we need to learn from for future aspirations.

**sportscotland** have carried out a Facilities Estate Review of which swimming is part, and we look forward to this being published in due course. We hope that this report will shine a light on the very real crisis facing Scotland's swimming pools and the need for Government action through investment and support to ensure access and availability for current and future generations.

## **Rachael Hamilton MSP written submission, 21 January 2026**

### **PE2018/R: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open**

As the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire, I am pleased to support Petition PE2018, with particular emphasis on the Laidlaw Memorial Pool in Jedburgh.

The closure of the Laidlaw Memorial Pool in November 2024 has had a real and lasting impact on Jedburgh and the surrounding area. For many years, the pool has been an important part of local life, providing a place for people to stay active and learn to swim. In a rural town like Jedburgh, losing a facility of this kind is not an option. Alternatives are limited, and the impact is felt most keenly by children, disabled people, older residents and those without easy access to transport.

Asking service users to use other facilities does not reflect the reality on the ground. Waiting lists, particularly for swimming lessons, are already significant. At a national level, participation in the Learn to Swim programme is now close to pre-Covid levels, with a 56% increase over the past seven years. Encouragingly, the proportion of children from Scotland's most deprived communities taking part has also risen, from 10% in 2018 to 16%. With this in mind, closing swimming pools represents a backwards step at precisely the time when access is most needed.

I have been working with local campaigners, councillors and community representatives to look at what options may exist to bring the pool back into use. The level of local engagement and concern speaks volumes about how valued this facility is. This is also an issue that matters to me personally, as my own daughter learned to swim at the Laidlaw Memorial Pool, which underlines how important such facilities are for families and young people.

The closure of the Laidlaw Memorial Pool in November 2024 has had a real and lasting impact on Jedburgh and the surrounding area, but it also reflects a wider challenge facing leisure facilities across Scotland. Leisure trusts and local authorities are under severe financial pressure to make savings, and while Live Borders' future plans emphasise community-based provision, the reality is that without adequate and sustained government funding, communities like Jedburgh are left to absorb the loss of essential services. The town has already seen key facilities disappear. In the past, a hydrotherapy pool was available locally and later transferred to the local hospital, where it has remained mothballed since the pandemic. For people living with conditions such as MS, MND and Parkinson's, this was not a luxury but a therapeutic lifeline that should be properly funded and protected. It is also worth

noting that in 2023 the UK Conservative Government provided an additional £63 million to support swimming pools in England, funding which generated Barnett consequentials for Scotland but was not passed on directly by the SNP Government to support pools here.

I would encourage the Committee to continue pressing the Scottish Government to work with councils and communities to find long-term solutions. Local swimming pools are vital community assets, and their future deserves serious and sustained attention.

### **Beatrice Wishart MSP written submission, 21 January 2026**

#### **PE2018/S: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open**

I would be most grateful if you would consider this as a further submission to support Petition PE2018: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open.

I spoke in support of this petition in the Chamber debate held on 6 January 2026. I spoke about the national loss of public swimming pools and that learning to swim should be available to all children.

Shortly afterwards the news broke of Shetland Recreational Trust's decision to permanently close the Scalloway swimming pool in my constituency.

The swimming pools in Shetland are run by Shetland Recreational Trust which receives financial support from the Shetland Charitable Trust. The recreational trust has had financial challenges for some time, and it is right that it has taken action to ensure the sustainability of all the leisure centres and swimming pools across its network.

While recognising the financial pressures on Shetland Recreational Trust, this decision is a great blow and disappointment to many in and around the village of Scalloway. I understand the community's shock and frustration about the decision and concerns about the lack of any community engagement on the loss of an important amenity.

I fear the closure may have a negative impact on school swimming and I strongly advocate for swimming, an important life skill, to be taught as part of the curriculum.

I understand from Scottish Swimming that Scalloway pool is one of seven in the country threatened with the prospect of closure.

It is particularly disappointing that this is the case, as the Scottish Government's budget recent announcement, in its promotion of a Summer of Sport for Scotland's children, includes provision for universal free swimming lessons for every primary school child.

Yours sincerely,

Beatrice