

Lothians MSP urges government – Save Our Pools!

At The Scottish Parliament last week a motion to Save Our Pools brought forward by Liz Smith MSP was debated.

Both the motion and debate recognised the importance of Scottish Swimming's 'Save Our Pool' campaign, which has been fighting to secure long-term financial investment from the government, in order to sustain swimming pools threatened with inflationary energy costs, staff shortages and, ultimately, closure.

Foyso Choudhury, MSP for Lothian, has been heavily involved in the campaign after West Lothian Leisure closed three swimming pools in his constituency.

Speaking after taking part in the debate, Mr Choudhury said: "Swimming pools are community lifelines for people to exercise, socialise and learn water safety.

"However, these vital community resources are under threat due to lack of Scottish Government funding to local councils.

"That's why it was so important for me to share my constituent's stories in the Chamber-to highlight how Scottish Government funding decisions leave people with 'sleepless nights' "

Mr Choudhury also highlighted in the debate how swimming is an important life skill and how these closures will mean even less children have the ability to learn to swim:

He continued: "Evidence shows that children from certain social and economic backgrounds are already at a disadvantage in terms of learning to swim.

"Are we really going to make that worse by removing community swimming pools altogether?"

Mr Choudhury wrote to the Minister for Social Care, Mental Well-being and Sport but was told there was no time available to meet.

He claims that this lack of engagement from The Scottish Government was also evident in Wednesday's debate when his question to the Minister on swimming pool closures across the whole of Scotland was not in his view fully answered by the Minister.

Mr Choudhury also wrote to the First Minister along with colleague Neil Bibby MSP. He has not, however, received a response as yet.

The MSP says that action from The Scottish Government and increased funding must be prioritised this term:

"The Scottish Government are responsible for funding local authorities and a lack of funding have meant that local authorities have had to make difficult decisions.

"The UK Government recently announced funding of £63 million to be directly invested into leisure centres with swimming facilities. When I questioned the Scottish Government on this, they confirmed that the consequential from that funding have been added to the overall Scottish bloc, but nothing further has been earmarked for swimming pools at this time.

"This is funding that should have been directly allocated to local authorities to fund leisure centres with pools.

"It is deeply disappointing that *there is no mention of swimming pools in the new Programme for Government.*

“I will continue working with the Council, Scottish Swimming, Ministers and all interested parties where possible to ensure that this devastating lack of Scottish Government funding does not destroy our swimming pools and other aspects of our Natural Health Service.”