

**Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ**

**Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ**

**Cc  
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for  
Intergovernmental Relations  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care**

**30<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

Dear Chancellor and Secretary of State,

### **Urgent support for public swimming pools through crisis**

I write as the cabinet member for the Living Well portfolio, which includes Leisure, at Woking Borough Council.

In January 2023, the Chair of Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, Local Government Association and stakeholder partners wrote to Government, highlighting significant concerns about the decision to exclude swimming pools and leisure centres from the list of sectors eligible for extra support under the [Energy and Trade Intensive Industries scheme](#) and the [Energy Bills Discount Scheme](#).

The Government responded in March 2023 by creating the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF), administered by Sport England in two phases, allowing local authorities to apply for funding for leisure centres with swimming pools facing urgent challenges.

The current administration in Woking has inherited significant financial challenges from the previous administration on taking up office in May 2022, this has since seen the issuing of a section 114 notice and intervention measures, including government appointed commissioners.

Woking council and local partners are collaborating with the aim to transform facilities into assets fit to meet the challenges of the future, in line with the [LGA](#) letter of January 2023. Woking's pool is now classified as 'unsecure', meaning there is risk of closure or reduced services before 31 March 2024. Additionally, Woking's provider contract has legally binding schedules that transfer the risk of energy price increases to our local authority meaning pressures will continue to rise on an already impecunious council.

As a local authority wishing to protect swimming pool facilities for our residents and to help Woking schools meet their statutory requirement to provide swimming lessons mandated by the National Curriculum physical education, Woking applied for a share of the Sport England (SPSF) funding of £63 million made available for leisure centres with pools.

Woking however encountered a difficulty in the application process.

The SPSF funding agreement sets out the requirements for local authorities to commit to maintaining public sector swimming provision at a required level and requires the confirmation of the Council's Section 151 Officer that these requirements can be met.

Woking, as a local authority under section 114, applying for the phase one revenue funding, had its application discounted. In August 2023, Woking's head of leisure services wrote to Sport England requesting for clarification on Woking's circumstances and continues to await a reply.

It appears contradictory that councils most in need of funding to protect community assets, are those who excluded from the funding offered. Facility closures, such as these, undermine the Government's commitment to support vulnerable communities, protect vital public services, tackle inequalities, and grow the economy.

I therefore ask the Government to act swiftly with two measures:

1. Reclassify grants from organisations such as Sport England, to include local authorities operating under section 114, allowing access to vital financial support needed.
2. To consider an obligation to include swimming pools within local authority statutory services, and that any statutory designation would be supported by adequate government funding – to fulfil the mandated requirement for schools to offer swimming lessons to key stages 1 and 2, to help navigate the health prevention agenda and minimise any long-term health consequences.

Woking has an ongoing constructive dialogue with Government commissioners on resolving Woking's financial situation and we ask Government to recognise our commitment and work in partnership to prevent Woking's Pool in the Park from closure.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Ellen Nicholson**

Woking Borough Council Portfolio Holder for Living Well

Mount Hermon Ward Councillor