

Agenda Item 18B – To receive and approve for the Mayor to sign the joint Mayors of Cornwall letter voicing strong opposition to the closing of Leisure Centres.

We, the undersigned Mayors and Deputy Mayors of Cornwall, wish to express our strong opposition to the Closure of Leisure Centres in Falmouth, Launceston, Saltash and Wadebridge, together with the hydrotherapy pool in St. Austell.

We are most unhappy with the decision of the Chair of Cornwall to refuse to take an indicative vote from all 87 Members of Cornwall Council, at the meeting of 30th November, such an indicative vote would not have been binding on the Council, but would have shown the true amount of opposition to the potential closures.

Whilst we recognise pressures on budgets, we believe that finance must be found to keep these Leisure Centres open in the short to medium term, allowing for full and meaningful discussion together with a review of how these Centres might be run in the longer term. Basing a decision on performance and attendance during the pandemic is wholly unacceptable.

We feel that Cornwall Council should recognise its culpability in previous decisions that have led, directly or indirectly, to the situation now arrived at, accepting responsibility and taking correct and decisive action as a corporate body, without playing any political blame game or point scoring.

The Leisure Centres must be given a fair chance to continue to operate and return to a viable basis, but it must be recognised that this is unlikely to happen overnight and that business plans would need to be developed to provide the basis of stability and viability. More time and support is needed to ensure this.

There are a number of ways in which closure of these facilities would go against professional and medical opinions, against central Government advice on health and obesity and against the objectives of Cornwall Council's own declaration of Climate Emergency.

We raise the following points, in no particular order.

- 1) Mental health is a big problem in Cornwall and has significantly increased throughout the pandemic, exercise stimulates and helps all concerned with this problem.
- 2) Obesity is a problem recognised by healthcare professionals and indeed by the Government. Exercise not only helps people keep fit and active but also reduces pressure on other services such as doctors and hospitals which are overwhelmed throughout Cornwall.

- 3) Closure of these Leisure Centres would be counter-productive in terms of carbon footprint aims, whereas keeping the centres open that we already have helps cut down on the amount of people having to travel to get to leisure centres in turn cutting down on the amount of traffic.
- 4) Alternative facilities in neighbouring Towns may not be able to cope with the potential influx of demand if the under-threat Centres are allowed to close. This has the potential to cause problems across much of Cornwall.
- 5) Closure of these Leisure Centres would discriminate against poorer families who might be unable to afford the private facility alternatives that may or may not be available. Many families would find the cost of travel unaffordable.
- 6) Schools are required to provide swimming and water safety lessons to all children as part of the curriculum, closure of the under-threat Leisure Centres would make this requirement near impossible to deliver, with lack of capacity and increased demand on time factors.
- 7) The opportunity for all to learn swimming skills in a coastal county with rivers and inland water has to be considered and will reduce demand on emergency services. The RNLI has come out in support of keeping these centres open.
- 8) Some towns that are not directly affected by the current proposals, have expressed concerns that this is simply the first wave of potential closures, with the possibility of further cuts to come, something that Cornwall Council seem unable to deny.

We, the undersigned, ask that Cornwall Council considers the potential impact and devastating effect on the lives, health and wellbeing of those that would be affected by the closure of any of the currently under-threat facilities.

Mike Tagg, Portreeve, Callington
Steve Eva, Mayor, Falmouth