

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

Rachael Hamilton MSP written submission, 21 January 2026

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.