Swim Ireland

SWIM IRELAND LOCAL AUTHORITY LEISURE INFRASTRUCTURE CONFERENCE

Swimming Pool Management Models

Assessing the options for local authority leisure centres in the Republic of Ireland

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TODAY'S SESSION

What we'll cover

1. Swimming pool provision in the Republic of Ireland
2. Local authority swimming pool provision
3. Management models - what they are, how they are used; pros and cons of each
4. How to decide on a model
5. Factors to consider when choosing a model in practice

SECTION 01

Swimming pool provision in the Republic of Ireland

Where does swimming sit in the national picture?
How much provision is there, and who provides it?

1. SWIMMING POOL PROVISION IN IRELAND

A system under pressure

Facilities Gap Analysis Report 2025

1 per 81,053

people per public pool in the RoI - compared with 1 per 14,047 in Scotland

57%

of all RoI pool space sits within hotels, where access and pricing are not necessarily designed for general public use

67%

of pools report waiting lists for swimming lessons - a clear sign that capacity is not meeting demand

25%

of the pool stock is now over 40 years old, with construction slowing sharply since 2010

SECTION 02

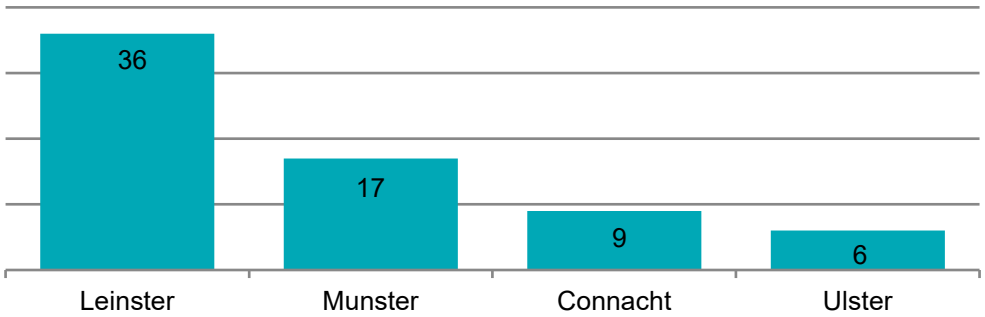
Local authority swimming pool provision

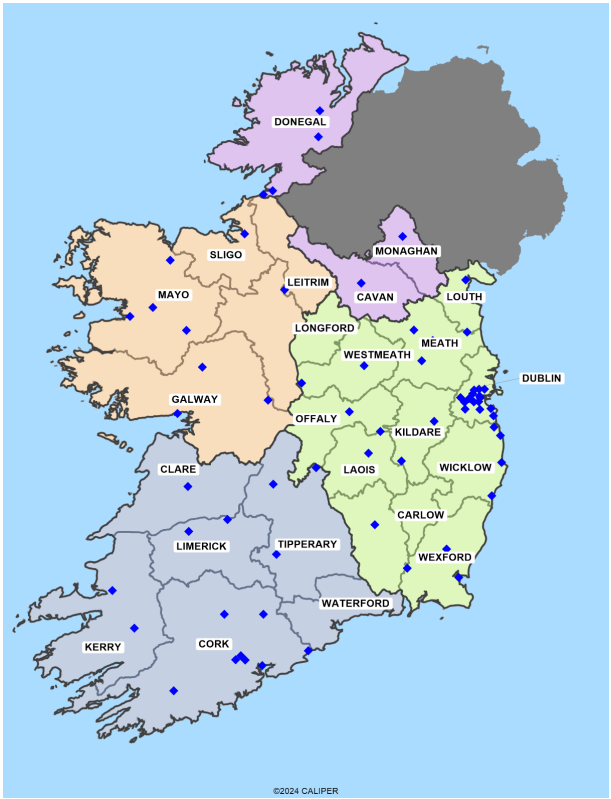
How many local authority pools are there, and where?

How are they provided, and how old is the estate?

2. LOCAL AUTHORITY PROVISION

68 pools, unevenly spread across the country



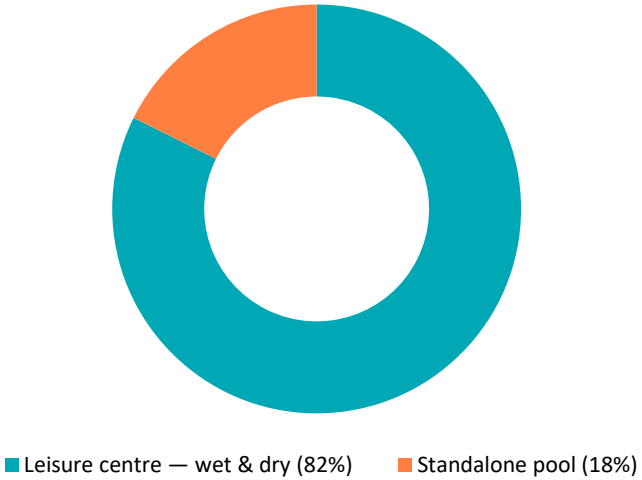


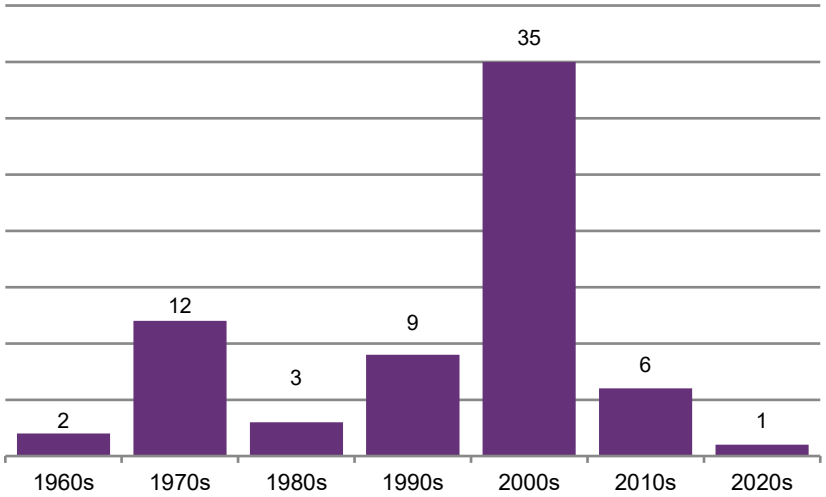
68 local authority swimming pool facilities across the Republic of Ireland

- Leinster alone accounts for over half of all facilities (36; 53%) - concentrated around Dublin
- But per head of population, Connacht and Ulster are actually better served than Leinster and Munster
- Nationally, there is a wide variation in level of provision county-by-county.

2. LOCAL AUTHORITY PROVISION

Mostly leisure centres and an ageing estate





- **82% of pools sit within a wider wet & dry leisure centre** – offering a broader, more resilient income base than a standalone pool
- **Half the estate was built in the 2000s**; a quarter of all facilities are now over 40 years old, with lifecycle investment a growing issue.

SECTION 03

Management models

What are the models?

How are they distributed across the Republic of Ireland?

Key characteristics of each model

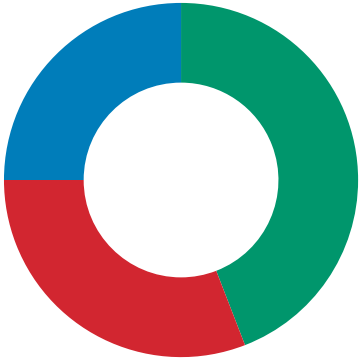
Advantages and disadvantages

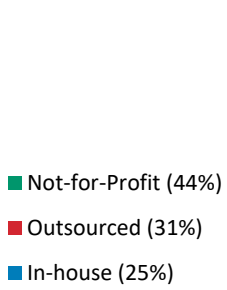
Four options, three underlying approaches

OPTION 1 IN-HOUSE	OPTION 2 OUTSOURCED	OPTION 3a NOT-FOR-PROFIT: LA-OWNED COMPANY	OPTION 3b NOT-FOR-PROFIT: SEPARATE COMPANY
The local authority owns and directly manages the facility All staff, income and expenditure sit with the council.	The LA is the “client” and contracts a specialist operator via a competitive tendering process Aura Leisure and Coral Leisure are the two main outsourced operators.	A new company (usually a CLG) is set up to manage the facility Owned and controlled by the local authority.	Similar to 3a, but the new company is legally separate from the council, with broader board representation.

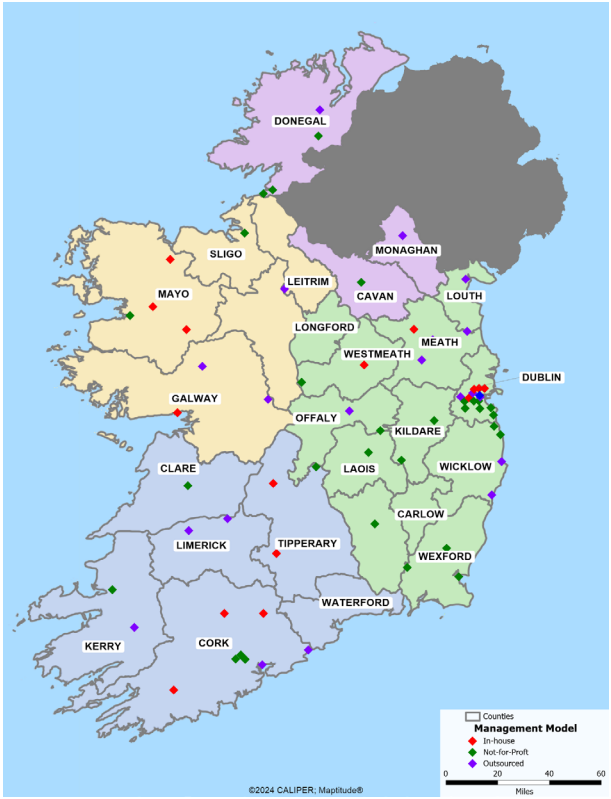
3. MANAGEMENT MODELS

The Not-for-Profit model is currently the most common



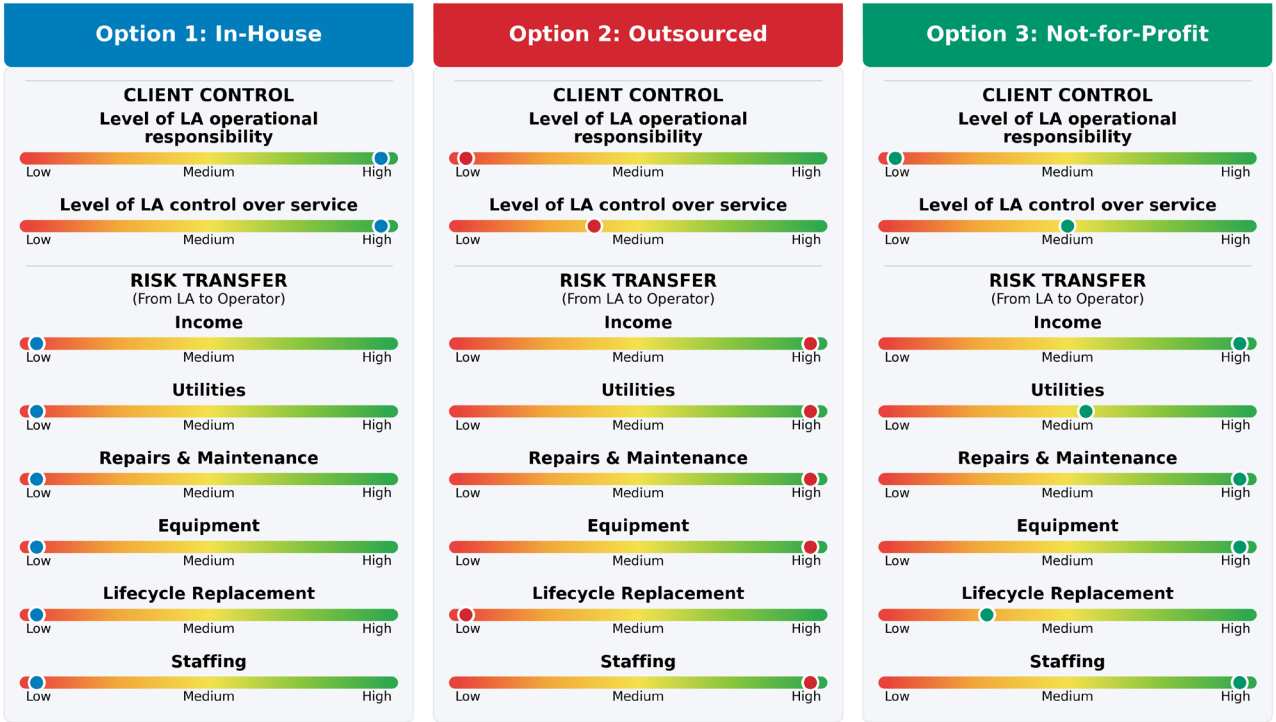


- **Not-for-Profit is the most common model** - 30 facilities (44%) - followed by Outsourced (21, 31%) and In-house (17, 25%)
- Within the NFP model, 60% are wholly-owned by the local authority and 40% are legally separate – most are structured as a Company Limited by Guarantee
- 10 local authorities run more than one model across their portfolio - Dublin City is the clearest example, with all three present.



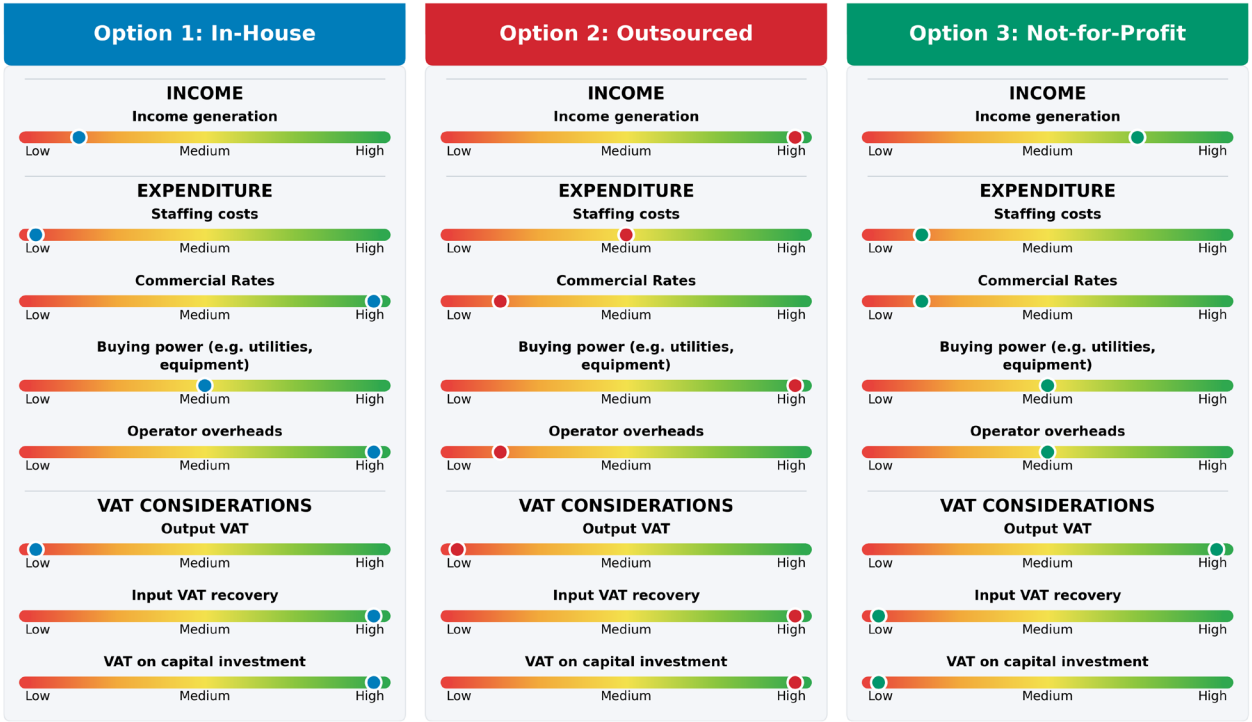
3. MANAGEMENT MODELS

Key characteristics: control and risk transfer



3. MANAGEMENT MODELS

Key characteristics: financial considerations



3. MANAGEMENT MODELS

Every model is a trade-off

IN-HOUSE

ADVANTAGES

- ✓ Full control over pricing, programming & staffing
- ✓ No Commercial Rates liability
- ✓ Efficient VAT recovery on running costs

DISADVANTAGES

- ✗ LA carries all financial & operational risk
- ✗ No specialist operator expertise
- ✗ Highest staff costs (public sector pay & pensions)

OUTSOURCED

ADVANTAGES

- ✓ Commercial expertise drives income & usage
- ✓ Operator takes on financial & operational risk
- ✓ Quickest, simplest model to implement

DISADVANTAGES

- ✗ Only two established operators in the RoI market
- ✗ Limited day-to-day LA control
- ✗ Needs a surplus-generating facility, or a subsidy

NOT-FOR-PROFIT

ADVANTAGES

- ✓ Risk transfer, with the LA still on the board
- ✓ Dedicated partner focused on participation
- ✓ Scope for community & NGB involvement

DISADVANTAGES

- ✗ More complex and costly to set up
- ✗ Can take years to reach full potential
- ✗ VAT exemption blocks recovery on capital works

SECTION 04

How to decide on a model

Depends on your specific situation and aspirations

Each model wins on different criteria

IN-HOUSE

- Retaining control over the service
- Staff terms & conditions
- Cross-departmental working

OUTSOURCED

- Financial outcome
- Operational expertise
- Transferring operational responsibility & risk
- Securing capital investment
- Relative simplicity of implementation

NOT-FOR-PROFIT

- Community involvement
- Transferring operational responsibility
- Middle way on financial outcome, risk transfer & capital investment

SECTION 05

Factors to consider when choosing a model

Nine practical parameters to work through once a direction is agreed

5. FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Nine key parameters to work through

1 Agreement term & extension provisions

How long and how much flexibility does the deal need?

2 Financial vs non-financial objectives

How important is surplus versus community and participation outcomes?

3 Single facility or portfolio

Is there scope to bundle sites for economies of scale?

4 Facility age & condition

What investment is needed ahead of any transfer?

5 Capital investment

How do new facilities or major upgrades fit the arrangement?

6 Client-side control

What level of oversight does the LA want to keep, whatever the model?

7 Risk transfer

What's the right balance of risk for the arrangement to succeed?

8 Oversight & performance

What reporting cycle and KPIs will be required?

9 Implementation process

What's the procurement route and a realistic timeframe?

SUMMARY

Five things to take away

1. 68 local authority pools across Ireland - much of the stock is ageing, and public provision remains well below international benchmarks.

2. No single model is “right” for every facility - the best choice depends on a council's objectives, risk appetite and each site's financial profile.

3. In-house maximises control; outsourcing maximises commercial expertise and risk transfer; the NFP model sits in between, keeping a voice on the board.

4. A structured, criteria-based assessment should guide the choice, followed by careful agreement design.

5. Get in touch with TSC or Swim Ireland to talk through what this means for your own facility.

THANK YOU

Questions

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