FROM POOL IDEA TO LASTING PUBLIC VALUE

How Swim Ireland can support local authorities to plan, build and operate better swimming facilities

Mary McMorrow – Interim CEO Swim Ireland

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INDEPENDENT • EVIDENCE-LED • PRACTICAL

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Ireland Active | Leisure, Health and Fitness Association

The promise: better decisions, made earlier

Swim Ireland can support the full journey without a commercial agenda.

Understand local need

Evidence and catchments

Test the right solution

Facility type and scale

Plan sustainable operation

People, programmes and finance

Deliver public value

Access, inclusion and participation

Our role is to help local authorities ask the right questions before expensive choices become difficult to change.

Swim Ireland: national remit, local impact

Our perspective spans the whole aquatic ecosystem.

Governing body

Swimming, diving, water polo and artistic swimming across the island.

Participation

First experiences, lifelong activity, outdoor swimming and community programmes.

Clubs & pathways

Support, standards, competition and athlete development.

Education

Qualifications and learning for teachers, coaches and the aquatic workforce.

Infrastructure

Evidence, planning tools, guidance, advocacy and operating insight.

Public value

Health, safety, inclusion, community cohesion and performance.

Policy gives us a shared direction

The National Swimming Strategy turns ambition into a national framework.

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National Swimming Strategy 2024–2027

A coherent pathway so everyone in Ireland has an opportunity to swim.

ACCESS

Inclusion & disability

INFRASTRUCTURE

Facilities

OPEN WATER

Safe opportunities

EDUCATION

Lessons & coaching

PATHWAYS

Performance

For local authorities, the practical test is clear: access + evidence + sustainable facilities + quality programmes.

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The case for swimming

A life skill, a lifelong activity and a community asset.

2nd

most popular adult participation activity

67%

of facilities offering lessons reported waiting lists

48%

of pools provide a pool hoist

28%

of pools are available for hire by clubs

A swimming pool is not simply a building. It is long-term civic infrastructure for safety, health, learning, inclusion and belonging.

Leisure facilities are where Ireland gets active

Gym, fitness and swimming activity together account for almost one third of adult participation.

32%

ALMOST ONE THIRD

of adults are active each week through personal exercise, weight training or swimming

Irish Sports Monitor 2025

THE PARTICIPATION ENGINE

The activities depend on accessible, well-run places to take part.

20%

PERSONAL EXERCISE

Ireland's most popular physical activity

4%

WEIGHT TRAINING

A growing part of gym-based activity

8%

SWIMMING

A lifelong activity with wide appeal

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY IMPERATIVE

Leisure facilities are not optional amenities. They are core health and participation infrastructure.

Our infrastructure journey

Each piece answers a different decision question.

What could we build differently?

How can we reduce energy and carbon?

Where are the deficits and barriers?

What is the best-fit local response?

The shift: from “a pool would be good” to an evidenced brief covering need, access, location, scale, sustainability and operation.

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From reports to a decision system

Evidence, practical guidance and tools that local authorities can use.

Gap Analysis: the national picture

The issue is public access to water space, not pool count alone.

346

operational pool sites in the Republic

57%

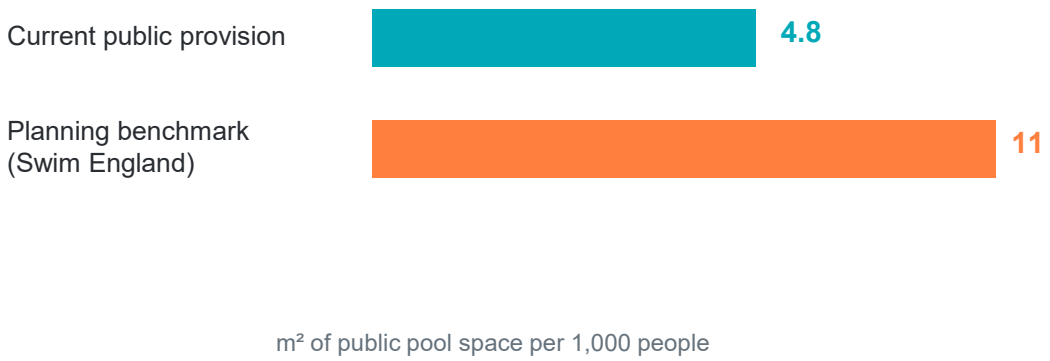
located in hotels

25%

built before 1990

67%

lesson providers with waiting lists



What this changes

Local authorities can see beyond nominal pool numbers to accessibility, affordability, lesson capacity, club access, condition, energy and geography.

Accessibility: reported access is not the same as usable access

The audit exposes a material gap between an “accessible” label and the equipment needed to enter the water.

85%

of pools reported being accessible to people with disabilities

But self-reported accessibility does not guarantee independent, dignified access to the water.

The audit notes that respondents may have had different interpretations of what “accessible” means.

48%

of pools reported having a pool hoist

28%

of hotel pools reported having a hoist

21%

of sites reported having Braille signage

LOCAL AUTHORITY PRIORITY

Design and fund for the full journey

Approach, changing, navigation and safe entry to the water must work together.

The practical ask: target capital and refurbishment funding at pool hoists, signage and other accessible infrastructure.

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FMG sport & leisure consultancy

Swimming Facilities Planning Model

From national evidence to a defensible local decision.

DEMAND

Population and propensity to swim

SUPPLY

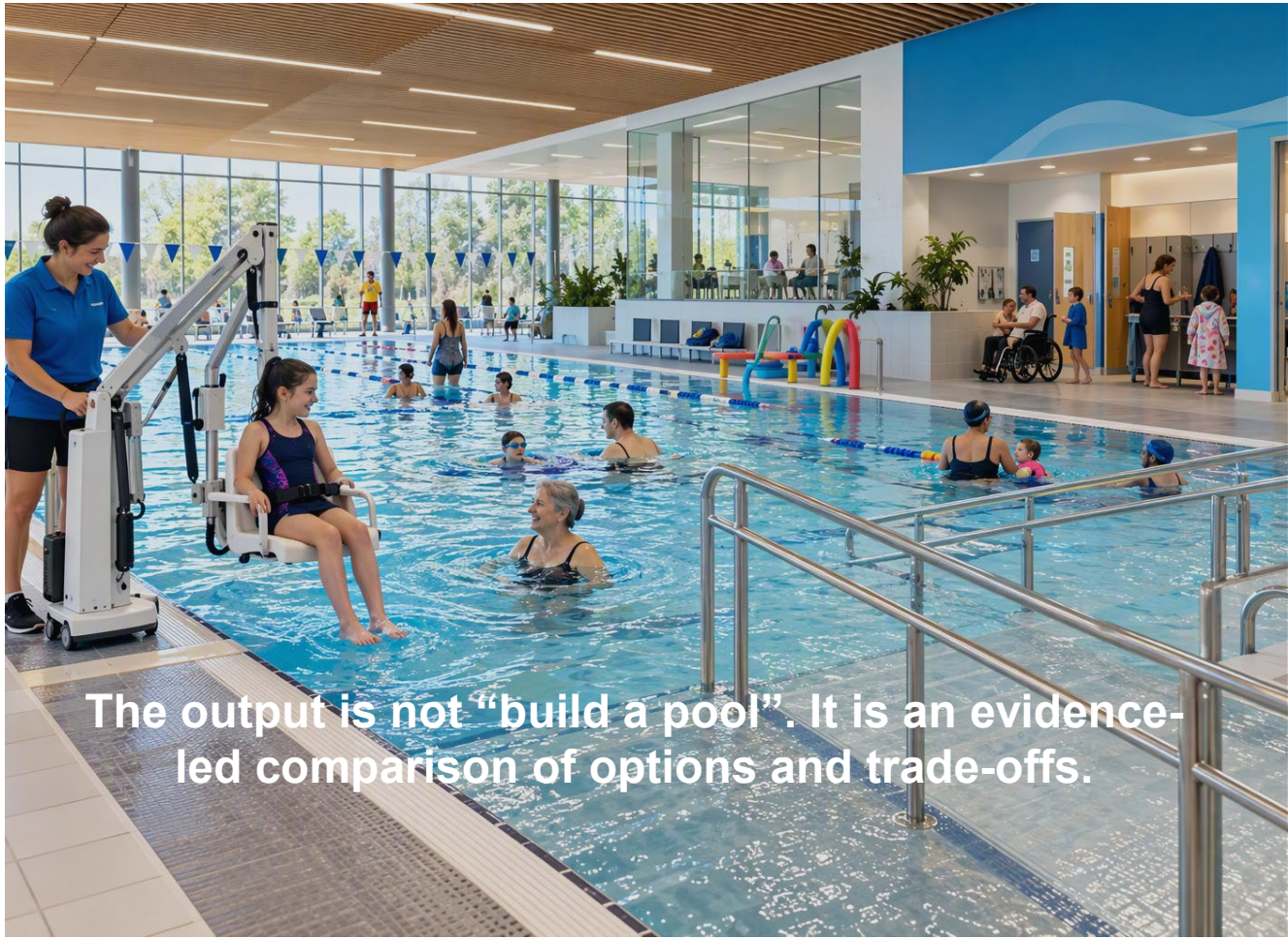
Pool water space and practical access

CATCHMENTS

Walking, cycling and driving times

SCENARIOS

Compare location, scale and likely impact



Practical resources: one place to start well

The Infrastructure Hub turns evidence into usable support.

Pool Evolution

Modern methods and alternative pool concepts

Eco Pools

Operational and technology options for energy efficiency

Suppliers Directory

Reputable expertise across the project lifecycle

Guidance

Safety, accessibility and certification references

Use the resources to frame the brief, understand choices and reach appropriate expertise. Procurement and due diligence remain with the local authority.

Launch: Pool Operating Models Report

Choose the model before the building fixes the answer.

Direct operation

Control and integration

Contracted operator

Specialist delivery under contract

Trust / not-for-profit

Mission-led operating structure

Other partnerships

Context-specific combinations

Assess each option through six lenses

Financial • Operational • Legal • Taxation • Governance • Local context

Key message: no operating model is universally “best”. The right model depends on objectives, risk, capability, scale and market conditions.

Launch: Swim Access Project

Move from assumed accessibility to disability-led evidence.

1. **CO-DESIGN** — People with disabilities shape the audit
2. **AUDIT** — Trained auditors assess real experience
3. **IMPROVE** — Evidence informs practical actions
4. **TRACK** — Progress can be measured over time

Accessibility is not a checklist completed once. It is an ongoing commitment shaped by lived experience.

Advocacy: turning local evidence into national action

We combine data, policy alignment and practical asks.

INVEST	A dedicated long-term pool capital and refurbishment programme
TARGET	Locate investment where access and capacity gaps are greatest
INCLUDE	Fund accessibility improvements and protect community access
TRANSITION	Support energy retrofit and sustainable operation
PLAN	Use data and standardised approaches to reduce avoidable delay

Local authorities are essential partners: your project experience, data and voice strengthen the national case.

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How we can work with your local authority

A practical advisory pathway from question to implementation.

LISTEN

Ambition, communities, constraints and partners

TEST

Need, catchment, existing supply and options

SHAPE

Brief, programmes, access and sustainability

CHOOSE

Operating model, delivery route and expertise

LEARN

Monitor access, performance and improvement

Bring us in early. The greatest value is often created before the facility brief is fixed.

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LET'S BUILD THE RIGHT SWIMMING FUTURE

Independent evidence. Practical experience. Public value.

Three questions to take away

1 What outcome does your community need?

2 What evidence should shape the brief?

3 What operating model can sustain it?

Thank you | Questions & discussion

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