

Council declines £11,000 donation, to avoid opening a sports centre on the Sabbath

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Campaigners have criticised Lewis Council after councillors declined a donation of over £11,000 intended to fund the opening of a popular swimming pool on Sundays.

Local people launched the fundraising effort after the Council declined to open the facility, citing cost reasons. The National Secular Society stepped in before the deadline to provide the remainder of the required sum for a one year trial, so that the Council would have no justification for not opening the pool on the Sabbath, which campaigners say is the real reason for the Council's decision.

The Council now say that the decision not to implement a pilot was not only based on the financial implications but the "need to represent the views of the majority of people in our wards."

Families into Sports for Health (FiSH) said it was "difficult for us to understand why the funds are not being readily welcomed."

FiSH are to hand over a cheque for the money at a public event in front of the council building on 3 February. They said: "We feel it is necessary to hold a public event for this offering as throughout this campaign there has been public confusion. The community saw the crowdfunder as a solution to the stated financial problem as precedent had been set with the swim club."

They said an "official and public statement" is now needed to explain why the Council is declining the funds, after citing a lack of money as the reason for not opening the pool on Sundays, which a survey suggested had overwhelming support.

"The Chief Executive ... stated that while there were staffing and operation concerns, these had not been fully investigated at the time and could be overcome. Finances were deemed the main concern, a £11.4k shortfall was declared and the community stepped in to help."

FiSH have said the cheque presentation will go ahead whether or not the Council is prepared to accept the funds.

"FiSH currently feel let down by the council's persistent efforts to keep the facilities closed on Sundays instead of reasonably considering the possibility of opening - especially with the many years of community demand to extend this service to 7 days."

One supportive councillor said it was "apparent" that religion was the real reason behind the Council's obstinate refusal to open to sports centre.

Alistair McBay, vice-president of the National Secular Society, wrote to [Hebrides News](#) that the Council "seems to wilfully ignore the fact that its job is to cater for all its citizens on equal terms."

"Councillors are supposed to represent all their electorate and not just those of a particular philosophical belief which they may happen to share."

"The very least we should expect of our elected representatives is that they judge and decide on key issues having given them due consideration based on reason, rationalism and the wider public interest. When instead individual councillors appear to make decisions based on personal religious belief and narrow personal conscience, then there is a democratic deficit that needs to be addressed."

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