

## **Rajesh Thind**

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## **Rachel Blake MP**

Member of Parliament, Cities of London and Westminster

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

By email: [rachel.blake.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:rachel.blake.mp@parliament.uk)

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## **RE: Proposed Closure of Golden Lane Sports and Fitness Centre — Request for Urgent Parliamentary and Political Action**

Dear Rachel,

I am writing to you as a constituent and a resident of the Golden Lane Estate — a community you know well. Golden Lane Sports and Fitness Centre, the only publicly-funded leisure facility in the Square Mile, is scheduled to close permanently on 30 April 2026. I am writing to ask for your help in preventing that closure.

The centre is still open. There are 23 days left. I believe your voice at Westminster, combined with the campaign we are running on the ground, gives us the best chance of forcing an emergency review before the doors shut.

### **What Has Happened**

Fusion Lifestyle, which operated the centre on behalf of the City of London Corporation, entered administration on 1 April 2026. Golden Lane is the only site in Fusion's entire national portfolio — over 100 facilities — confirmed to permanently close. Every other affected local authority in England found a transition arrangement:

- Lambeth Council saved Brockwell Lido — same operator, same administration date — within hours, as one of London's most financially stretched boroughs.
- Somerset kept four Fusion-run centres open. Charnwood kept three. Newcastle safeguarded its historic City Baths.
- The City of London Corporation, which manages over £2 billion in endowment funds, concluded that no solution existed. Residents dispute this conclusion, and the evidence suggests they are right.

### **What We Have Established**

Since the announcement on 1 April, residents have established the following — each of which is independently significant:

**First, the decision-making process.**

We have been informed by two ward councillors independently that the decision to allow the closure was not taken by the Community and Children’s Services Committee — whose own published terms of reference give it explicit responsibility for running the centre. It was taken by the Town Clerk, Ian Thomas CBE, acting under an urgency or delegated authority procedure. Elected ward members were apparently not consulted before the decision was taken. The centre does not close until 30 April — nearly four weeks after the administration was announced. The urgency basis is, in our view, deeply questionable.

### **Second, the contract the City designed.**

The City did approach other operators to take over the centre. All declined. The reasons given, we are told, were the prohibitive terms of the existing contract and the economics of the facility. The contract is understood to have made the operator liable for repairs and maintenance, despite the City being the landlord. This is the contract that produced the building deterioration now cited as a reason for closure. The City cannot present the consequences of its own contract design as an external market failure beyond its control. Residents have long called the operator “Con-Fusion” — a reflection of years of poor management that the City, as contracting authority, had both the obligation and the power to address.

### **Third, the Regulator for Social Housing.**

In February 2026 — less than two months before the closure announcement — the Regulator for Social Housing issued a judgment rating the City of London Corporation’s management of its housing stock at C3, one grade above the lowest possible rating. The Regulator found approximately 1,000 outstanding fire safety notices and concluded that the Corporation would not meet Decent Homes Standard until 2035 — a standard that should have been achieved by 2010 and that councils with far larger housing portfolios have already met. This was the first time an external regulator had passed judgment on the City Corporation’s performance. The leisure centre closure is not an isolated incident. It is the latest symptom of the same systemic pattern of deferred maintenance and governance failure.

### **Fourth, the Care Act dimension.**

Golden Lane Sports and Fitness Centre currently provides three programmes that engage the City Corporation’s statutory duties under the Care Act 2014:

#### **CARE ACT 2014 – STATUTORY DUTIES ENGAGED**

Exercise on Referral — a 12-week, GP-prescribed programme linked to the City of London Registered Medical Practice and Barts Hospital. From 1 May, GPs will have nowhere to refer patients on this programme.

Young at Heart — subsidised elderly fitness at £1.50 per session, serving a neighbourhood where the 65–84 population has grown 20 per cent in recent years.

SEND sports provision — dedicated swimming, football, and gym for disabled children and young people.

Sections 1, 2 and 6 of the Care Act 2014 are all engaged. We are taking legal advice. We have formally asked the City Corporation whether any compliance assessment was conducted before the closure decision was made.

### **Fifth, their own words.**

In December 2024 — sixteen months ago, when the City announced a £10.35 million refurbishment for the centre — Policy Chairman Chris Hayward said: “We are proud to continue our significant investment in Golden Lane for the wellbeing of all our residents.” Committee Chair Helen Fentimen said: “The health and wellbeing of our residents is our number one priority.” The City’s own Global City of Sport Strategy 2023–2030, still in force, names Golden Lane Leisure Centre as a core facility. The centre is scheduled to close in 23 days.

### **What We Are Asking of You**

Formal letters have gone this morning to Chris Hayward, Helen Fentimen, Ian Thomas (Town Clerk), all nine Cripplegate ward elected members, S&W Partners (administrators), the CEO of St Bartholomew’s Hospital, and Charterhouse Square School. You are copied on the key

correspondence. A press release goes to media this morning. ITN are considering the broadcast angle. The Guardian has been approached for print.

The specific actions we are asking of you:

1. Table urgent written parliamentary questions to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government — Steve Reed — asking: (a) what guidance the Government issues to local authorities on maintaining leisure provision during operator insolvency; (b) what the Minister's view is of the City Corporation's decision not to bridge-fund continued operation when every other affected authority did so; and (c) whether the City Corporation's conduct is consistent with its obligations under the Care Act 2014, given the removal of GP-linked, elderly, and SEND provision without apparent compliance assessment.
2. Raise the Regulator for Social Housing's C3 judgment with Steve Reed directly, asking whether the Minister is satisfied that the leisure centre closure is consistent with the Corporation's obligations and whether the governance failures that produced the C3 rating are being addressed.
3. Write formally to Ian Thomas CBE, Town Clerk, asking him to confirm the basis on which the urgency procedure was invoked to close the centre without elected member consultation, and whether he will agree to an emergency review before 30 April.
4. Raise this publicly — in the House, in media, and on your social channels — using the frame that the City of London Corporation is the only local authority in England that chose not to protect its community leisure facility when every other council did.
5. Attend and speak at the emergency residents' meeting we are convening in the next two weeks. Your presence would signal that this matter has Westminster attention and would be enormously encouraging to a community that has been told, in effect, that the decision has been made and there is nothing to be done.

### **Why This Matters Beyond Golden Lane**

You know this community. You have spoken publicly about the Golden Lane allotments and what this part of the City means. But I want to be honest with you about why I think this is a story that goes beyond one estate.

The City of London Corporation is a unique constitutional entity. It governs a Square Mile with fewer than 10,000 residents but over 600,000 workers, using a business franchise vote that gives corporations electoral power alongside residents. It manages a £2 billion endowment and raises over £1 billion annually in business rates. It operates largely beyond the kind of external scrutiny that other local authorities face. The Regulator for Social Housing's judgment was the first time an external body had formally found it wanting. And now, in the same period, it is the only local authority in England to have closed a community leisure facility it could have kept open.

This is a question about accountability, about democratic governance, and about who the City of London Corporation ultimately serves. As the first Labour MP to hold this seat, and as someone who has direct experience of how the Corporation operates, you are uniquely placed to raise those questions at Westminster in a way that no one else can.

I would welcome a brief conversation at any time this week. The centre is still open. There is still time. I hope we can count on your support.

Yours sincerely,

**Rajesh Thind**

Resident, 104 Crescent House, Golden Lane Estate, EC1

*Enclosures: Formal letter to Chris Hayward and Helen Fentimen (6 April 2026); Formal letter to Ian Thomas CBE, Town Clerk (6 April 2026); BGLNF Consultation Response March 2025; City of London Corporation Global City of Sport Strategy 2023–2030; Regulator for Social Housing judgment February 2026; Care Act 2014 Sections 1, 2 and 6.*