

CABINET - 3 SEPTEMBER 2008

PORTFOLIOS: LEISURE, CULTURE AND  
YOUTH MATTERS  
EMPLOYMENT HEALTH AND  
WELL BEING.

## GOVERNMENT FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME FOR OVER 60's AND UNDER 16's

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Earlier this year the Government announced its intentions to introduce a free swimming programme to encourage Local Authorities to provide free swimming for those aged 60 and over and 16 and under.
- 1.2 Earlier this month the Council received details of the proposals, a number of which needed clarification. This clarification has now been received from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the purpose of this report is to set out details of the scheme and the implications for this Council.

### 2. THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL

2.1 A summary of the Government's proposal is as follows:-

#### 2.1.1 60+

- Free swimming all year round for all adults over 60 in any public session to which they would normally have access
- Total annual funding for the scheme of £15m in 2009/10 & 2010/11
- Annual funding allocation for NFDC of £72,892 in 2009/10 & 2010/11)
- Confirmation required from councils of their participation in the scheme by September 15th

#### 2.1.2 U-16

- Free swimming for children U-16 all year round in any public session to which they would normally have access
- Expressions of interest by councils in the scheme by September 15th
- Total annual funding for the scheme of £25m in 2009/10 & 2010/11
- Annual funding allocation to each participating authority for the U-16 scheme to be confirmed once expressions of interest have been received
- Confirmation required from councils of their participation in the scheme by October 15<sup>th</sup> 2008

#### 2.1.3 General

- Funding cannot be used to subsidise existing schemes providing free swimming
- Further funding for 2011/12 and subsequent years will be subject to the outcome of the next government spending review and informed by evidence of the effect of the 2009/10 & 2010/11 schemes

- Local authorities can if they wish participate in the 60+ scheme only. However they can only participate in the U-16 scheme if they have confirmed participation in the 60+ scheme i.e. to take part in the U-16 scheme they must participate in both
- Both schemes are open to any individuals in the age categories wishing to access public swimming sessions and cannot be restricted to residents within the district

2.1.4 In addition there is a pro rata population based share of a £10m capital fund in 2008/09 for authorities who sign up to both schemes

## 2.2 Main Issues for Consideration

### 2.2.1 60+ Scheme

- There is already a strong expectation amongst the 60+ that they will swim for free
- The 60+ scheme will be much easier to implement than the U-16 given the nature of their use
- Financially the 60+ scheme will represent a cost to the Council
- There is unlikely to be a knock on effect on other users
- It is likely lead to some increase participation amongst a target group
- There will be wider health and well being benefits from any increase in participation.
- There is unlikely to be a major increase in our costs

### 2.2.2 U-16 Scheme

- It is likely to lead to a substantial increase in participation across a major target group.
- There will be wider health and well being benefits from this increase in participation.
- There is likely to be an increase in costs of supervision, cleaning, chemicals etc
- Experience at other local authorities shows a negative effect on participation in other user groups
- We do not know the funding allocations at this point
- There is little awareness of the potential for free swimming amongst this group currently

## 3. SERVICE IMPLICATIONS

### 3.1 60+ Scheme

3.1.1 The 60+ swimming programme is well established and unlikely to change much as result of the introduction of the scheme. As such it is unlikely to have any knock on effect for any other user groups.

3.1.2 The scheme is likely to lead to an increase in participation amongst this category of users as it will;

- Attract swimmers from other private sector providers
- Encourage new swimmers in this age group

- Encourage existing swimmers to swim more often
- 3.1.3 The increase in participation is unlikely to have any major effect on the standards of service in respect of cleaning, maintenance or staffing levels.
- 3.2 U-16 Scheme
- 3.2.1 Evidence from similar schemes introduced at other (mainly urban) authorities in recent years shows that there is likely to be a substantial increase in participation particularly at weekends and during school holidays.
- 3.2.2 Unless the whole swimming programme is carefully managed there is a risk of use by other groups not included in the scheme i.e. adults and families, being affected by this increase in use.
- 3.2.3 The scale of the increase in participation is likely to have an effect on standards of service in respect of cleaning, maintenance and staffing levels unless additional resources are employed.

#### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 60+ Scheme
- 4.1.1 The government has allocated £72,892 in both 2008/09 and 2009/10 to the Council for funding the 60+ scheme. Total funding is therefore £145,784.
- 4.1.2 The estimated loss of income across the service is for the two years of the scheme is £182,848 which includes both casual income and swim memberships.
- 4.1.3 Overall it is estimated that the introduction of the scheme would cost the Council £37,064 over the 2 years of the scheme.
- 4.1.4 There may however be some potential for increased income from secondary spend on retail goods and vending. It is difficult to estimate what this increase is likely to be.
- 4.2 U-16 Scheme
- 4.2.1 The Council already provides free swimming for under 8's. Since this initiative was introduced in January 2008 there has been little effect on swimming income overall mainly because of the increase in family swimming.
- 4.2.2 The allocation of funding for the U-16 scheme is not yet known although the Council has to express an interest in the scheme by September 15th. However once funding levels are known and a financial evaluation made we would have the option to withdraw from the scheme by October 15th.
- 4.2.3 The estimated income to the Council from casual swimming and memberships in the U-16 age group for 2008/09 is £92,596
- 4.2.4 Given the anticipated increase in participation levels there is likely to be an increase in costs for lifeguarding, cleaning & maintenance, and chemicals which will need to be taken into account in any financial evaluation of the scheme.
- 4.3 Consideration has been given to any likely "substitution effect" with users moving from classes /lessons into casual swimming. The considered view is that although there may be some movement in this respect there is also a possibility that increased participation in general will lead to increased awareness in and usage of activities other than casual swimming particularly as users will have more

disposable income available. This element of the scheme is therefore considered to be cost neutral.

- 4.4 Although there is talk of extending the scheme to the 16-60 age group at sometime in the future they are currently not included in the scheme. In order to minimise the effect on this important user group Centre Managers will review their swimming programmes in order to “protect” their access. It is likely that this will result in a slightly more formalised pool programme which includes designated sessions for juniors, adults, families and seniors. There may also be some increase in use by families associated with the U-16 scheme. Overall this element of the scheme is considered to be cost neutral.
- 4.5 A summary of the financial implications is shown in Appendix 1.

## **5. OTHER ISSUES**

- 5.1 The proposed scheme has received substantial coverage in the media and there is a strong expectation amongst the 60+ age group that they will have access to free swimming in the near future. There is currently less expectation amongst the U-16 age group although this is likely to rise as further details of the scheme and its implementation are released.
- 5.2 The funding for the scheme is initially for two years only 2009/10 & 2010/11 and while further funding will be considered as part of the next spending review based on evidence of the outcomes from the first 2 yrs there is no guarantee that funding will continue.
- 5.3 The overall effect of any decision to participate or otherwise will be strongly influenced by what our neighbouring authorities decide to do. If facilities close to each other but in different authorities take a different stance on participation then there is likely to be a dramatic effect on usage and income in both. There has been some dialogue with our neighbours but as yet no decisions have been made.
- 5.4 The Council may therefore wish to consider whether any participation at this stage should be on a two year “pilot basis” only pending a decision on future central government funding and a detailed evaluation of the outcomes from any scheme which is implemented.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Given the timescales involved there has been no official consultation with users, although informally we know that there is an expectation amongst the 60+ age group that the Council will introduce free swimming at some stage.
- 6.2 There has been informal consultation with neighbouring authorities.

## **7. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS**

- 7.1 Both of the Portfolio holders strongly support the schemes in principle given the potential benefits which they bring to the target groups involved.
- 7.2 However they both feel that given the significant initiatives already in place for encouraging participation in the U16 age group and the effect the scheme could have on programmes and costs the full implications of the scheme for this age group require detailed evaluation before a final decision is made.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Additional swimming usage as a result of this scheme may result in an increased use of energy and consequential CO<sup>2</sup> emissions

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 It is recommended that the Council

- Confirms its participation in the 60+ free swimming scheme by Sept 15<sup>th</sup>
- Approves a supplementary estimate of £19,000 in 2009/10 to fund the scheme
- Expresses their interest in the U-16 scheme by Sept 15<sup>th</sup>
- Undertakes a detailed evaluation of the U-16 scheme prior to the deadline date of Oct 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Agrees that any participation at this stage should be on a two year “pilot basis” only pending a decision on future central government funding and a detailed evaluation of the outcomes from any scheme which is implemented.

### **For further information contact:**

Bob Millard  
Assistant Director of Leisure Services  
Tel: 023 8028 5469  
Or email: bob.millard@nfdc.gov.uk

### **Background papers:**

**APPENDIX 1****Financial Analysis of Free Swimming Initiative**

<b>Swim Category</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Grant</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Seniors	£91,424	£72,892	NA	-£18,532
Juniors	£92,596	To be confirmed	£?	£?