

20th November 2008

Free Swimming for Over 60's and Under 17's

Report by Leisure Centres Co-ordinator

1. Background

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of a decision of the Chief Officers Management Team (COMT) on a proposal made by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for free swimming. COMT made this decision due to the very short timescales provided by DCMS for the council to respond to the proposal by 24th October 2008. Prior to making its decision both the Leader and Executive Cabinet Member responsible for Leisure Centres were consulted.

2. The Offer

- 2.1 There are 4 incentives for Local Authorities to offer free swimming:

a) Free Swimming for Over 60's

£15m per annum for 2 years between all 354 Local authorities dependant on size of 60+ population. HDC's allocation is £45,627.

b) Free Swimming for Under 17's

£25m per annum for 2 years dependant on size of U-17 population. HDC's allocation is £86,141.

c) Modernising Pool Provision

Any Local authority that participates in **both** schemes is eligible for a share of £10m capital funding to modernize pool provision. This is a one-off capital grant. For HDC this would equate to £37,905

d) Modernising Pool Provision – Capital Challenge Fund

A further £25m is being made available for years 2009-11 for capital related to pool provision and to support more ambitious plans for free swimming. This might involve free swimming lessons, swimming co-ordinators or further capital improvements.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 HDC already offers reduced prices for Over 60's and Under 18 swimming. Swimming for Under 5's is free. Additionally, annual, 6-month and 30-day passes are available offering savings for regular swimmers. Further, the Advantage membership, our all-inclusive package, includes swimming as one of its many products on a pre-paid monthly or annual basis.
- 3.2 Estimated income (07-08) from these age groups is indicated below.

2007-08			
Over 60's	Total swims	Income (£k)	
Casual swims	10,399	20.0	
Passes	8,570	11.5	
Direct Debit	9,984	7.3k	(10% of total Over 60 DD income)
Annual	3,340	2.3k	(10% of total Over 60 Annual income)
Total	32,293	41.1	

2007-08			
Under 17's	Total swims	Income (£k)	
Casual swims	61,261	85.6	
Passes	11,213	19.0	
Total	72,474	104.6	

4. Benefits, Disadvantages and Risk

4.1 Benefits

- Increased participation by Over 60's and Under 17's
- Improved health of District population over the medium term
- Revenue subsidy matches current income levels for Over 60's

4.2 Disadvantages

- Revenue funding is for a guaranteed 2 years only. Future allocation is subject to the next Spending Review.
- Neighbouring Authorities may not participate in the scheme and non-District residents could, potentially, use HDC facilities for free. This is a condition of the award.
- Limited capital funding
- Revenue subsidy for Under 17's does not match current income levels for this age group.

4.3 Risk

- There is more certainty with Free Swimming for Over 60's. Current income and amount of subsidy are similar. There is no indication that we would ever be inundated with 60+ swimmers.

Less predictable is whether free swimming will affect other activities. There is a possibility that some or many of the Direct Debit and annual Advantage members could cancel their payments and only use the pool for exercise.

- For U-17's the position is much less clear. The subsidy falls short of income by at least £15k per annum. Further, mass participation is far more likely for U-17's particularly during weekends and school holidays in public swimming sessions. This may in turn have a knock-on effect on the income generated by other groups of swimmers. The possibility of school holidays with free swimming for children would be excellent for admissions but could result in permanently full pools with a commensurate increase in life-guarding costs, strain on personnel and no revenue whatsoever.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Based on the amount of funding and the impact on the service a formal response was made to DCMS on October 24th indicating the Council's acceptance of the Over 60's offer but rejection of the Under-17's scheme

5. Recommendation

- 6.1 Cabinet is requested to endorse the decision to:
- a) Accept the Government's proposal for Over 60's
 - b) Reject the Government's proposal for Under 17's

Background Papers

DCMS Papers (July 2008) Ref CMS 99869/MK
Ministerial Statement – Andy Burnham, DCMS – July 2008
Previous Management Committee Reports
Leisure Centres Annual Report 2007/08