

BOROUGH OF POOLE

COUNCIL

23 SEPTEMBER 2008

**FREE SWIMMING FOR 60 PLUS AND 16 AND UNDER: REPORT OF THE
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider Cabinet's recommendation not to implement the Government initiative for free swimming for 60 plus and 16 and under for the financial year 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 with no certainty of funding in 2011/12 or in further years.

2. DECISION REQUIRED

- 2.1 That Council be recommended not to proceed with the proposed Government Scheme for free swimming for 60 plus and 16 and under at this time until the proposals were fully funded by Government and not time limited to 2 years.

3. BACKGROUND/INFORMATION

- 3.1 Cabinet, at its Meeting on 9 September 2008, had considered the Report of the Head of Leisure Services (copy enclosed, minus, in the interests of economy, Annex A, entitled "Free Swimming Programme Grant Allocations to Provide Free Swimming for those aged 60 or over" which has previously been submitted to Members with Cabinet papers and can be found on the Borough of Poole website [www. boroughofpoole.com](http://www.boroughofpoole.com) under Agendas and Minutes).
- 3.2 Whilst this initiative was to be welcomed, since the Report has been written, I have been able to assess the serious implications of the under funding on the budgets and the inevitable negative effect the proposals would have on Council Taxpayers. I have asked the Officers to review this issue and I am particularly concerned as Bournemouth Borough Council is rejecting this officer which would bring additional stress and usage on the Borough's swimming pools if the Council was to implement the proposals.
- 3.3 I draw Members' attention to the success of the Council's "Silver Swims" which are funded by the PCT and already free or subsidised swim periods at Rossmore and the Dolphin Pool for the Borough's Senior Citizens. Access to Leisure swims are also available at £1.15.

- 3.4 Of particular concern and in the light of the Government's failure to think through other "free schemes, such as concessionary fares", I do not feel it prudent to recommend Council pursue an interest in the Government initiative to provide free swimming for people aged 60 years and over and people aged 16 and under as I feel this will be to the detriment of the Borough.

COUNCILLOR PETER ADAMS
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES

BOROUGH OF POOLE

CABINET

9th SEPTEMBER 2008

FREE SWIMMING for 60+ AND 16 AND UNDER: REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE SERVICES

1 Purpose and Policy Context

- 1.1 To provide information on the Government's Free Swimming Initiative and to ask Cabinet if they want the council to participate.

2 Decision Required

- 2.1 That the Cabinet recommend to Council:
- (a) Participation in providing free swimming for the 60+ age group.
 - (b) Submission of an expression of interest in providing free swimming for the 16 and under age group (details of BoP's prospective allocation for this age group will be released by 30th Sept)
 - (c) Operation of the 60+ scheme at Dolphin Swimming Pool and Rossmore Leisure Centre.
 - (d) Identification of additional financial support from partners including the PCT to provide free swimming opportunities at Broadstone Leisure Centre.

3 Background

- 3.1 On 6th June 2008 the Government announced that as part of creating a lasting legacy from the London 2012 Olympic Games, it aimed to provide free swimming for all in England by 2012.
- 3.2 On 29th July 2008, the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport issued a written statement outlining the proposals to work in partnership with local government to work towards providing free swimming.
- 3.3 This involves encouraging local authorities to provide free swimming for people aged 60 years & over and people aged 16 and under. In return, the government has made available £140 million in a mixture of revenue and capital grants to support local councils over the next two years.

4.0 **Current Situation**

- 4.1 Dolphin Swimming Pool provide free “Silver Swims” for over 60s for 3 hours on a Thursday morning and Rossmore Leisure Centre 1 hour on a Monday and 1 hour on Thursday morning.

Other free swimming initiatives:

Free disabled swimming sessions offered at Dolphin and Broadstone

Free swimming offered to “Splash School” members at Dolphin & Rossmore

5.0 **Attendance**

- 5.1 SLM Ltd who manage Dolphin & Rossmore in partnership with Borough of Poole have estimated that the number of individual (non member) swims by the 60+ age group p.a. is:

Dolphin	13200
Rossmore	4580

- 5.2 SLM have estimated that the number of individual swims by the 60+ age during “Silver Swim” Sessions is:

Dolphin	2030
Rossmore	1758

6.0 **The Governments free swimming offer**

- 6.1 The Free Swimming Programme applies to local authorities and local authority-owned pools, including those whose operation an authority contracts out to a trust or private company.
- 6.2 The definition of free swimming is that it would be unrealistic to have 24 hour access to all pools, given the authority's other commitments, so the offer is in accordance with local programming.
- 6.3 However, swimming should be free for those eligible when they would normally be admitted to the pool for public swimming.
- 6.4 The Government are not being prescriptive in terms of how any authority delivers this across their pools, but in practice they expect someone eligible (60 or over and/or 16 or under) to be able to get a free swim at a pool in the participating authority at a time and place when and where they'd normally expect to get a swim.
- 6.5 The DCMS have reiterated that the free swimming scheme if adopted is to apply to local authority-owned pools, including those whose operation an authority contracts out to a trust or private company.

- 6.6 Broadstone Leisure Centre is leased to Poole Sports Trust under a non-commercial lease for a nominal sum. The centre is neither, operated nor managed by the Borough. The Council does however provide subsidies to the centre to encourage its participation in a number of schemes such as the GP Referral Scheme.
- 6.7 The advice is that the pools managed by SLM (Dolphin and Rossmore) are included and the inclusion of Broadstone is possible under the terms of the scheme, consultation with DCMS supports this interpretation.
- 7.0 **Government Funding**
- 7.1 There are 4 programmes and associated funding pots available:
1. Free swimming for those aged 60 or over (based on pro rata population)
 2. Free swimming for those aged 16 or under
 3. Modernising pool provision – capital reward fund (dependent on offering 1 & 2) pro rata population-based
 4. Modernising pool provision – capital challenge fund (dependent on us offer 1 & 2) bidding system
- 7.2 **Pot 1.**
- 7.2.1 The government has allocated a total of £50,774 p.a. to Borough of Poole in each of the financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11, the allocation is based on the number of people aged 60 and over living in Poole. (39,328 people)
- 7.2.2 There is no certainty of funding in 2011/12 or in further years. **The grant is to help fund the cost of free swimming for 60s and over** and is a share of £30 million amongst 354 local authorities.
- 7.2.3 Free swimming means free at any time of the year when people would normally pay for admission to a public session (ie. it is not possible to introduce new restrictions on the times that people can swim for free and we are still able to charge as normal for tutored sessions).
- 7.3 **Pot 2.**
- 7.3.1 An additional amount **to cover the costs of free swimming for those aged 16 and under** will be made available but the level of funding available will only be confirmed once the Council has expressed an interest. This sum will be a share of £50 million. If local authorities aren't happy with the confirmed allocation, they have until 15th October to change their stance on free provision for those 16 and under.
- 7.3.2 Free swimming for those 60 and over is the minimum provision required (ie. it is not possible only to provide solely for 16s and under).
- 7.4 **Pot 3.**
- 7.4.1 A total of £10 million of capital is available in 2008/9 for those local authorities agreeing to participate. We may receive a 'pro rata population based share' of this (ie

amount uncertain). This is for 'modernising pool provision' which probably means low cost improvements such as new lockers, etc

7.5 **Pot 4.**

- 7.5.1 A further £50 million is being made available over the 2 years 2009/10 and 2010/11 for more ambitious projects

8.0 **Process**

- 8.1 Council's wishing to participate in the scheme and provide free swimming to people aged 60+ years, must confirm their participation by the 15th September 2008.
- 8.2 Council's wishing to participate in the scheme and provide free swimming to people aged 16 years and under, must also submit an expression of interest by 15th September.
- 8.2.1 However, the financial allocations to Councils for this element have not yet been notified. The Government aims to provide information on allocations to Councils by 30th September 2008 and authorities are then required to confirm their participation in the scheme by 15th October 2008.

9.0 **Financial Considerations**

- 9.1 SLM are keen to support this initiative and accordingly would be prepared to accept the full value of the grant allocation to the Borough (£50,774 p.a) in exchange for operating the scheme.
- 9.2 SLM have estimated their loss of income in operating the scheme to be £59,202.48 p.a. and will bear this loss and the risk of further losses in excess of the grant.
- 9.3 In addition, income may be lost as paying customers decide that the pools are too busy to swim in and customers who currently pay a monthly gym membership or splash school membership and swim for free as part of that may decide not to join or cancel existing contracts.
- 9.3.1 Some additional income may be gained from secondary sales, e.g. catering.
- 9.3.2 If the pools are significantly busier than at present, additional lifeguarding may be required (one full time lifeguard costs approximately £20 000 per annum).
- 9.4 SLM have considered the increased operating costs e.g. chemicals, lifeguarding, showers, etc, however these are very difficult to calculate and may be offset by additional secondary spend so they have not pursued this issue.
- 9.5 The Government has not stated the financial allocation for Borough of Poole if it did wish to participate in providing free swimming for the 16 and under age group.

10.0 **Key Issues - Benefits**

- 10.1 This initiative links well with Council's Corporate objective of Promoting Health & Wellbeing. The scheme could mean new health benefits for those who may find cost a barrier at present.
- 10.2 Swimming is the most popular participation activity for over 60's in England with 7 per cent swimming at least once a month. Swimming has many health benefits including cardio vascular fitness and together with other measures, could help support a drop in rates of deaths from heart disease.
- 10.3 Swimming is also a popular activity with under 16s with 38 per cent of people between the age of 11 to 16 year olds in England swimming at least once a month. Participation rates amongst young people locally are thought to be higher than the average for England due to the strong club network in the Borough and the development of the swimming lesson programme. As a coastal Borough, the ability to swim and the encouragement of this amongst young people is also a community safety issue as well as being supportive of their participation in other sports and leisure activities locally.
- 10.4 As a potential host for pre-Olympic Games Training Camps in 2012, we are committed to working with partners and government to secure a lasting legacy for the community from the games, notably, "12 for 2012", the Strategic Partnership's legacy ambitions which includes aims of increasing participation in sport, improved community health and improving the well being of Poole's deprived communities.
- 10.5 The Free Swim Scheme could support the legacy goals and provide the potential of further investment to improving the Poole's swimming facilities

11.0 **Key Issues – Concerns**

- 11.1 In considering the Governments Free Swim Initiative there are a number of issues and questions concerning its impact, sustainability and delivery.
- 11.2 **Facilities** - The first concern is the impact free swimming in council facilities might have on the sustainability of other facilities. The provision of free swimming at council facilities may undermine the viability of other swimming facilities, forcing them to operate more restricted hours or even close. The scheme therefore could potentially have a detrimental impact on swimming provision as a whole in the Borough and lead to less facilities and provision than we currently have.
- 11.3 **Users** - The delivery of this scheme might impact on existing users. Under safety guidelines, all swimming pools have a limit to the number of people permitted at any one time based on their area size. At peak times, swimming facilities are already heavily subscribed, sometimes over subscribed. By offering free swimming to some groups of users, other groups who currently use the facilities for sport, fitness and health may no longer be able to gain access and thus be displaced with an obvious detrimental impact on sports development and community health for these groups. In addition, this would also lead to income loss; making it more challenging to maintain

swimming facilities and a good level of service.

- 11.4 **Sustainability** - Swimming facilities are expensive operations to sustain if they are to be kept to a good or adequate standard and run within the prescribed safety regulations and guidelines. Most local authorities are under considerable financial pressure to find efficiencies, financial savings and generate income in order to maintain services the community values, improve performance, whilst keeping council tax increases low. BoP has felt this pressure for some time and we know our future financial shortfalls which we need to bridge, remain considerable. There is a risk that in participating to provide a scheme with such positive health benefits, that if further funding is not provided after 2011 the Council would be forced to either take funding from other services to meet the costs of the scheme or withdraw from the provision of free swimming which would undoubtedly disappoint those groups concerned.

CLIVE SMITH
HEAD OF LEISURE SERVICES

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Background Papers:

Letter from Paul Bolt, Director, Sport and Leisure, Department for Culture, Media and Sport to Chief Executives of English Councils – 29th July 2008