

Cabinet

28 August 2008

Free Swimming



Report of Roger Elphick, Acting Corporate Director, Environment Cabinet Portfolio Member for Environment – Councillor Bob Young and Cabinet Portfolio Member for Healthier Communities – Councillor Eunice Huntington

Purpose of the Report

- 1 As part of its desire to encourage people to take more regular exercise, and linked to the 2012 Olympic legacy, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has announced a grant aid scheme for Local Authorities to provide free swimming to those aged 60 years and over and those aged 16 years or under.
- 2 This report establishes the criteria for grant application and seeks to inform Members of the implications and opportunities of participation.

Background

- 3 The DCMS confirmed to all District Chief Executives in correspondence dated the 29th July, the Government's offer of Grant for Local Authorities to allow free access to swimming pools for those aged 60 years and over and those aged 16 years and under. DCMS expects Local Authorities to confirm their participation in the scheme(s) by the 15th September and 15th October respectively.
- 4 The letter offer dated the 29th July was sent to all Districts with the responsibility for providing public swimming facilities. The offer is not open to County Councils and does not include school swimming. However, school pools will be considered for capital grant if they contribute toward the overall free swimming scheme. Specifically, DCMS is providing grants to Local Authorities should they choose to participate in the free swimming scheme for those aged 60 years and over only or those aged 60 years and over and 16 years and under. Local Authorities are able to choose either one age category or both age categories. In essence, access to existing swimming programmes and timetables for these targeted age groups will be free of charge.

- 5 Within the County there are existing programmes of free swimming targeted similarly at the Government's age groupings. Where these exist, grant could be used to further enhance existing schemes, for example structured sessions or classes and/or to widen the age range of customers able to enjoy free access. Over the past few days, it has become clear that further, more local information is required to match existing swimming programmes to grant criteria, but what remains crucial is to make available a consistent offer across the County. Furthermore, DCMS is making available to authorities who participate in both age range schemes, a share in a Capital Reward Fund designed to help modernise pool facilities.
- 6 A further Capital Challenge Fund will be available for Local Authorities to bid into to help support more ambitious plans for swimming generally. Details of the Capital Challenge Fund will be announced at a later date but will be administered via Sport England.
- 7 DCMS has confirmed that a grant of £159,834 p.a. will be available to the new unitary authority for the financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11 to enable those 60 years and over free access to swimming. This level of grant has been calculated on a per capita basis and is the cumulative grant which is arrived at when all the individual grant directed towards existing District Councils has been assembled as a total amount. The level of Government grant to offer free swimming to those aged 16 years and under has not yet been confirmed but this information is expected by the end of September.
- 8 It should be noted that the authority is only able to receive grant for those aged 16 years and under if it agrees to provide free swimming for those aged 60 years and over. Similarly, a formula for establishing the amount of capital which will be allocated to the new authority under a Capital Reward Fund Scheme, should it agree to the free swimming initiative, has not yet been confirmed. However, this capital grant would again be based on a pro rata population share of the £10m nationally which is being made available from 2008 to 2009.
- 9 Given the level of Government commitment to the free swimming initiative contained within a range of media announcements, there is a very strong expectation that authorities would wish to participate. The new unitary authority's reputation could benefit significantly from being able to announce its commitment to sporting activity by enabling key customers to swim free of charge at every public pool in the County from the 1st April 2009, at least until 31st March 2011.
- 10 Due consideration will need to be made of this initiative when developing Revenue Budgets for 2009/10. However, the early indications from Districts are that the level of grant being made available to allow free swimming for those aged 60 years and over should be sufficient to enable the scheme to be cost neutral. A more detailed financial analysis of both targeted age groups will be conducted as a matter of urgency and will be factored into the LGR Finance Workstream's Budget Schedule.

- 11 With regard to the Capital Reward Fund, although grant will be made available in 2008/09, measured consideration will be given to the work of the Asset Management Working Group and the work which has been commissioned with PMP Consultants across the County to provide a strategic view of leisure facilities. How and where this Capital Reward Fund Grant will be invested, will be the subject of further consideration.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 12 It is recommended that the authority submits a positive expression of interest to DCMS to make swimming for both age categories identified above, free of charge in all community swimming pools within the County in line with the grant conditions to enable the Districts to take up the Government offer.
- 13 A further report will be submitted to Cabinet once further details of the scheme are made available.
- 14 Proactively embracing the free swimming initiative supports the DCMS Legacy Action Plan: Before, During and After: Making the most of the London 2012 Games states: *'After walking, swimming is the next most popular form of recreational physical activity. Among those who said they were interested in doing a new sport, swimming emerged as the most popular. Swimming has unique fitness benefits and can be particularly appealing to people with mobility problems and those who wish to protect their joints. Swimming is also a very good cardiovascular exercise.* DCMS want to extend the considerable benefits of swimming and encourage providers to take a more user-focused approach.
- 15 Pioneering participation in the programme will send the message out that the new authority is committed to reducing health inequalities and promoting the reduction of obesity in adults and children.

Background Papers

DCMS Circular dated 29th July 2008

Contact: Phil Ball Tel: 01388 816166 Ext 4386

Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

Report considered by Joint Implementation Team and agreed for submission.

Finance

Revenue implications will be reviewed during the budget process but it is expected that the grant should cover costs of over 60's. Under 16's funding is yet to be announced. Capital finance to modernise pool provision is integrated into the free swimming programme.

Staffing

Resource implications will be determined once take-up is realised.

Equality and Diversity

Equality Impact Assessments will be required upon the Free Swimming Programme. Contributes to the social cohesion agenda.

Accommodation

N/A

Crime and Disorder

N/A

Sustainability

N/A

Human Rights

N/A

Localities and Rurality

Links the Concessionary Travel Scheme to the Health Improvement agenda and takes account of affordability and access.

Young People

Contributes to the Access to Sport agenda of 'Things to do, places to go'.

Consultation

N/A

Health

Contributes to the Regional Health Improvement Strategy and the Health Improvement Plan.

Improving the take up of social and leisure activities by older people - improving health and social inclusion.