





**Report of: Community Scrutiny Committee**

**To: Executive Board**





**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> January**

**Item No**

**Title of Report : Free swimming for children – a review of the first 12 months**

**Summary and Recommendations**


  
  
  





**purpose of report:** To report to the Executive Board the recommendations of the Community Scrutiny Committee as part of their discussions on the Free Swimming Scheme

**Key decision:** No






**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr David Rundle

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Report Approved by:**  Andy Collett – Financial & Asset Management  
Jeremy Thomas – Legal Services

**Policy Framework:** No

**Recommendation(s):** The Executive Board is asked to respond to the Community Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations:

1. Ask officers to consider whether it would be feasible to introduce a scheme to mitigate the transport costs for children in the highest areas of deprivation to access swimming facilities.
2. Make the geo-demographic database system available for general use across the Council;
3. There should be more data on ethnic monitoring.
4. A report on progress should be made each year.

## 1. Background

- 1.1. Community Scrutiny thought it was an opportune time to review the impacts of the Free Swimming Scheme for Young People, since the scheme had been in place for over a year.
- 1.2. The Policy Officer's (for Health & Social Inclusion) report on the impacts of the scheme is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3. Overall the amount of swimming sessions undertaken by children in the first year of the scheme has increased by 88%.
- 1.4. In terms of whether the scheme is having an impact in raising the levels of swimming amongst children who wouldn't otherwise attend e.g. children in low - income families, the findings are variable.
- 1.5. There is a relationship between take-up of free swimming and proximity to a pool. Therefore the scheme has been successful in areas such as Barton & Sandhills. However there was low take-up in other areas of high deprivation such as Greater Leys. The Committee would therefore like investigation into possible ways of off-setting the transport costs to encourage usage by children living in areas of high deprivation.
- 1.6. Leisure Services did not collect swimming data by ward before the scheme was introduced. It is therefore impossible to determine whether the scheme has narrowed the gap in take up of swimming between the poorest and most affluent areas of the City. The Committee thought that the Council should ensure it had robust baseline data capture systems in place for all Social inclusion projects such as this.
- 1.7. A new geo-demographic data base system was about to be purchased. This would enable census data and survey data to be used to characterise households at post -code levels. The Committee thought this data capture system should be made available for general use across the Council, once purchased.
- 1.8. The report has also highlighted current data capture gaps. For around 25% of children's swimming sessions no membership details were recorded. Ethnicity data was only recorded on 35% of members records, which made it impossible to conduct any meaningful analysis. As monitoring usage data by ethnicity was a core part of the council's duty to promote race equality, the committee recommended that Leisure Services needed to give urgent consideration to how this could be improved.
- 1.9. The Committee thought the level of marketing, particularly that aimed at its target audience was limited. Marketing had mainly been undertaken within the leisure sites themselves. The Committee thought schools should be involved in this and that more consideration should be given to promotional events.

- 1.10. The Committee has requested a further report from Leisure Services (In February) to establish what work has been undertaken as a result of the key findings from the report.

## **2. Minutes of Community Scrutiny – 15<sup>th</sup> November**

### **56. REVIEW OF FREE SWIMMING SCHEME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Strategic Director, Physical Environment, submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended). Mark Fransham introduced the report and highlighted the main findings. He said that Leisure and Cultural Services officers were currently considering actions to address the issues raised.

The following points were raised during discussion.

- There was concern at the lack of data available prior to the beginning of the scheme, which made it difficult to assess its success.
- There was also concern at the level of failure to record swims because of missed card swipes.
- There was concern at that the lowest level of take-up was in the most deprived section of the community.
- It was suggested that transport costs may be a factor, particularly where children lived some distance from swimming facilities, and that some way of mitigating transport costs should be investigated.
- Another way of increasing take up in areas of high child poverty could be to target marketing campaigns through relevant schools and to arrange special events to attract new users.
- It would be useful to contact other local authorities to see whether lessons could be learned from their experiences.

Resolved to RECOMMEND the Executive Board to: -

- (1) Ask officers to consider whether it would be feasible to introduce a scheme to mitigate the costs for children in the highest areas of deprivation to get to swimming facilities.
- (2) Make the geo-demographic data system available for general use across the Council;

(3) There should be more data on ethnic monitoring.

(4) A report on progress should be made each year.

**3. Comments from Portfolio Holder (Cllr David Rundle)**

None received

**Contact :** Julia Woodman, Scrutiny Officer

**Tel:** 252318 **E Mail :** [jwoodman@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:jwoodman@oxford.gov.uk)

**Background papers:** None