

To: City Executive Board

Date: 18th February 2009

Item No:

Report of: Head of City Leisure

Title of Report: Free Swimming

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To advise members in relation to the Department of Culture Media and Sports (DCMS) announcement to offer funds to provide/support free swimming and capital investment into swimming pools.

Key decision – No

Executive lead member: Cllr Bob Timbs

Report Approved by:

Finance: Chris Kaye

Legal: Jeremy Thomas

Policy Framework:

- Stronger and more inclusive communities.
- Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life
- Transform Oxford City Council by improving value for money and service performance

Recommendation(s):

- 1) To progress with the free swimming initiative
- 2) That the funding is used to expand the community benefits attained from the current free-swimming initiative
- 3) That the funding for modernising pool provision (Capital Challenge Fund), is then bid for to support the development of a new competition pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure centre

1. Background

- 1.1 On the 6th of June 2008 the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport (DCSM) announced details of the Government's free swimming scheme to be delivered in partnership with Local Government.
- 1.2 The Government announcement set out a £140 million package to support free-swimming opportunities in local authority swimming pools across England, commencing on the 1st of April 2009. The scheme sets out a '*coherent series of funding programmes*' designed to extend opportunities to swim and to maximise the health benefits of participation in swimming.
- 1.3 There are four areas of funding available.

Free swimming for those aged 60 or over (Revenue funding)

- In each of 2009-10 and 2010-11, a total of £15 million has been made available to local authorities to offer free swimming to those over 60.
- The amount allocated to Oxford City Council is £30,186 per annum for a two-year period.
- Funding would be available in 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

Free swimming for those aged 16 and under (Revenue funding)

- In 2009-10 and 2010-11, a total of £25 million has been offered to provide free swimming to those aged 16 or under.
- Entry is only available to those local authorities who choose the minimum offer of providing free swimming for those aged 60 or over and wish to provide an additional offer for those aged 16 and under.
- Oxford's amount in the under 17s has increased from £58,036 to £70,038 as some authorities have restricted their participation to applying just for the funding of free swimming for those aged over 60 and some have opted out altogether.
- Funding would be available in 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

Modernising pool provision - Capital Reward Fund:

- Entry is available to local authorities that have signed up to the funding for both over 60's and 16 and under free swimming.
- This pot comprises £10m capital to reward authorities that have signed up to both pots (*including those who already make available free swimming offers that would have otherwise qualified for funding*)
- OCCs allocation has now increased from £33,928 to £45,187 which is available in 2008/09.
- Due to the difficult funding year for capital works, the £45,187 will be allocated capital projects already undertaken that benefit free swimming.

Modernising pool provision- Capital Challenge Fund:

- Sport England will administer this capital fund on behalf of the Government.
- Entry is available to local authorities that have signed up to the funding for both over 60's and 16 and under free swimming.
- There is £50m available to be bid against the Free Swimming Capital Modernisation Programme (FSCMP)
- Round One bids are to be committed by 2009/2010 and are to be submitted by January 2009. Round Two bids are to be committed by April 2009.
- Funding bids need to focus upon increasing participation within the two the two target groups (over 60s and under 17s).
- A bid of £500,000 has been discussed towards the teaching pool and a moveable floor at a replacement competition pool in the south of the City. Sport England have indicated that the bid would progress through the initial stage, ready to be worked up in more detail.

Allocations are awarded using a formula based on the size of local populations for the relevant age groups.

- 1.4 The Government has stressed that the scheme is aimed at encouraging increased physical activity and should enable local authorities to deliver against the physical activity national indicator (NI 8).
- 1.5 It was agreed at the Weekly Business Meeting on the 8th of September 2008 that OCC would opt into the funding of free swimming for those aged 60 & over and express a level of interest in the funding for free swimming for 16 years and under (as the allocations had not yet been announced for that particular area).
- 1.6 The DCMS have reported that 291 local authorities have now opted into the funding for free swimming for those aged 60 & over and 211 have also opted into free swimming for 16 years and under.
- 1.7 On the 27th of November 2008 the DCMS announced that authorities opting into the funding for both over 60's and 16 and under free swimming, would receive a 20% increase in their entitlement
- 1.8 Those authorities who opt into both elements of the scheme will receive a pro rata population-based share of the £10 million capital that has been made available this year. This has again been increased and, OCCs Modernising pool provision - Capital Reward Fund entitlement (one off capital funding) has increased from £33,928 to £45,187.
- 1.9 Authorities opting into free swimming funding for both those aged 60 & over and 16 and under can then also bid for a share of £25 million capital funding available in each of 2009-10 and 2010-11.
- 1.10 The option to withdraw from the scheme is available throughout, but the funding would need to be returned to the DCMS.

- 1.11 Where authorities are already funding free swimming, the funding has to be used to add to the current offer and cannot be used to fund the current activities.
- 1.12 No other Oxfordshire districts have previously offered free swimming and have all decided against progressing with the initiative. As there can be no restriction on access, there is a risk that free swimmers from outside of the city may be drawn in to use our facilities for free.

2. The Local Picture

Oxford City Council has nine pools at six locations:

- 1) Barton Pool (25m pool)
- 2) Blackbird Leys Pool (18m pool)
- 3) Ferry Sports Centre (25m pool and a learner pool)
- 4) Hinksey Outdoor Pool
- 5) Temple Cowley Pool (25m competition pool, learner pool & diving pool)
- 6) Peers Pool (20m pool)

- 2.1 Although the Oxford swimming club are becoming ever more successful in competitive swimming, the City has very low levels of children in state schools achieving the required basic standards compared to the national averages.
- 2.2 The City Council has offered free swimming since 2006/2007 when £125,000 revenue funding was added to the leisure budgets. In its first year the scheme witnessed an 88% increase in the number of visits for children swimming.
- 2.3 This increase in junior swimming has not continued after the first year of operating, in 2007/08 there was a 19% drop in junior swimming to a total throughput of 61,852
- 2.4 Participation in free swimming varies significantly across the City; from only 11% of children who live in the City centre, to 55% who live in the areas surrounding Hinksey pool.
- 2.5 Children from the poorest fifth of areas in Oxford are less likely, by approximately 5%, to use the free-swimming scheme than children in other areas
- 2.6 Evidence shows that free swimming is a deterrent to adult bathers.
- 2.7 All OCC pools already offer specific free sessions for 60 and overs.
- 2.8 Entry costs are only a portion of the costs of participation, a key barrier to some of the most deprived is accessibility and the inability to swim.

3. Timescales

Milestone	Milestone/ decision point	Project Termination Point
Jan 31 st 09 – Final date of round one detailed bids	31 st March 09 – DCMS decision returned	
April 09 – Round 2 bidding timetable (2010/11) announced	May 2009	
Commit expenditure from pot 4	2010/2011	
Programme formally closes		Sept 30 th 2011

4. The Free Swimming initiative supports the below corporate objectives:

- Transform Oxford City Council by improving value for money and service performance
- Stronger and more inclusive communities
- Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life

5. Financial Implications

Activity	Actual 2008/2009	Estimated Income 2009/2010	Estimated Income 2010/2011
Over 60s funding from pot 1		£30,186	£30,186
Under 17s funding from pot 2		£70,038	£70,038
Pot 3 – one off capital	£45,187		
Grant to the contactor		£113,000	£113,000
Balance	£45,187	-(12,776)	-(12,776)

- 5.1 A subsidy of £113,000 will be paid to the preferred contractor in 2009/10 alongside the management fee, netted off for any recharge to the operator for utilities costs. The subsidy for 2010/11 and future years will remain capped at a maximum of £113,000 and the payment will be subject to evidence of usage. If the usage drops below the level of £113,000 the subsidy will be reduced to reflect this in the following year.
- 5.2 In accordance with the conditions of the initiative this funding needs to increase participation in the scheme. This would be done through a free swim coordinator or developing top up sessions for none swimmers.

5.3 The fall back position for the council after the two year funding has expired is that of £113,000 and will still cover the cost to the council of free swimming due to the cap in the contractor fee over the next ten years.

5.4 As users will come from across the county a LAA funding bid will be submitted on the 23rd Jan 2009.

5.5 The benefits

- Oxford City is already a leader in free-swimming provision and can use this funding to add significant value to the current free-swimming offer.
- The current scheme is in need of development – the funding could be used to enable such improvements e.g. top up swimming sessions.
- Some Oxford City Council pools are in desperate need of modernisation – the capital from pots three and four could help improve the facilities, or to kick start development projects.
- A number of LAA targets would benefit e.g. increasing activity, fall prevention and obesity.
- The subsidy to the contractor is capped so there can be no increase in subsidy.
- If usage falls then the subsidy to the contractor also reduces in line with this.

5.6 Concerns:

- It is difficult to predict the level of potential usage and budget impact, there may be knock on effects from existing paying customers, however this is the operating partners risk.
- Cross-District provision with customers willing to travel for free access, especially with free bus passes.
- The provision must be unrestricted, removing the possibility of having focus sessions to limit the detrimental impact on casual bathers.
- Authorities must complete a full year and cannot stop the provision when the funding runs out.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

Risk & Description	Likelihood	Impact (High/Medium /Low)	Counter Measures
As this is an National initiative not joining the scheme risks negative PR	H	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress the scheme / or • Promote the fact that we already offer free sessions to over 60s

The Government revenue support runs out in two years, the removal of any concession after that will risk negative PR.	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through fall back options: • Continue the scheme • Future funding options • Cap in place with new leisure contractor
That the council misses a significant and unique opportunity to improve access for target groups	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress the scheme
That the council misses out on the opportunity to attain capital to improve facilities	H	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress the scheme
The scheme prevents the ability to offer free swimming as part of a residents cards	M	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the scheme develops investigate the financial implications and the impact this may have
Blanket free swimming reduces participation from other groups	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further lifeguard training and reviewing sessions / the use of lane ropes
The initiative focuses on one barrier “entry costs,” the blanket element hampers the ability to creatively use the scheme to increase participation from hard to reach groups and to make the scheme sustainable	M	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement top up sessions and a free swimming coordinator

7. Climate Change / environmental impact

With an increase in participation there would be an increase in the amount of water used within the pools and also pool chemicals to ensure the disinfection of pool water. Any potential new build in the future would need to have a full assessment of its impact.

8. Equalities Impact

The funding will have a significant positive impact on equalities and will help promote community cohesion particularly in areas of deprivation such as Blackbird Leys. There will be an increase in participation particularly by the following groups;

- Children & Young People
- Over 60's
- Those on low income

9. Legal Implications

Authorities must complete a full year and cannot stop the provision when the funding runs out.

10. Options:

10.1 Continue to progress with the scheme

10.2 Members could opt for us not to confirm our intention to join the scheme. We would then be unable to join at a later date as our ring fenced funding would be allocated to those Councils that opt to join both Pot 1 and Pot 2.

11. Recommendations

11.1 To progress with the free swimming initiative

11.2 That the funding is used to expand the community benefits attained from the current free-swimming initiative

11.3 That the funding for Modernising pool provision (Capital Challenge Fund), is then bid for to support the development of a new competition pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure centre

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Background papers: None
Version number: 4