

To: City Executive Board

Date: 1 September 2010 **Item No:** 14

Report of: Head of City Leisure & Parks

Title of Report: Free Swimming Programme

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

To propose how to respond to the Government's announcement to remove the free swimming funding as of the 31 July 2010, and seek approval for introducing a targeted Free Swimming Programme in the City's swimming pools.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Councillor Bob Timbs

Report approved by:

Finance: Gillian Chandler

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Policy Framework:

- Stronger and more inclusive communities
- Improve the local environment, economy & quality of life
- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

Recommendations:

- 1) That blanket free swimming is removed as of the 1 September 2010.
- 2) That a targeted Free Swimming Programme is offered for under 17's, (30 hours a week spread across the city's pools), to Oxford City residents as of the 1 September 2010.
- 3) That the City Executive Board recommends to council that £18,600 is added to the leisure budget to fund the revised Free Swimming Programme for the remaining seven months of the year between September 2010 and April 2011 from the council's contingency fund.
- 4) That a revenue budget bid is submitted as part of the 2011/2012 budget process to fund the continued provision of 30 hours per week for under 17's free swimming.
- 5) Introduce a charge to over 60's of £2.10 for casual swimming (£3.10 at Hinksey).

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Free Swimming Programme was designed to extend opportunities to swim and to maximise the health benefits of wider participation in swimming; *'To get more people swimming more often'*. Swimming is now the number one participation sport in England. In 2010 more than 3.16 million people are now swimming at least once a week.
- 1.2 Swimming has a universal appeal, low barriers to participation and well-documented health benefits.
- 1.3 The City Council introduced free swimming for those under the age of 17 years in April 2006. On the 6th of June 2008 the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced details of the Government's free swimming scheme to be delivered in partnership with local government. In April 2009 this announcement led to the city's scheme being expanded to offer blanket free swimming for those over 60, prior to that the city already offered 12 sessions of free swimming for over 60's.
- 1.4 In the financial year 2009/10 the council received funding of £100,300 from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to fund the Free Swimming Programme. The council provided a further £12,700 to make up the £113,000 agreed with Fusion Lifestyle within the contract to run and develop the city's leisure centres, to cover the costs of free swimming.

Table showing free swimming take up

	05/06 (pre free swimming)	06/07 Year 1	07/08	08/09	09/10 (Over 60s added)	Year to 31 July 10
Barton	Facility opened in April 2006	14,367	9,264	9,674	8,426	3,889
BLP	Data not available		1,894	1,775	1,636	711
Ferry	17,381	23,783	22,329	22,325	14,345	8,719
Hinksey	8,392	13,659	7,392	8,258	7,061	6,777
Peers	2,067	2,556	2,799	Facility no longer managed by OCC		
TCP	12,599	21,678	18,174	20,139	12,232	6,459
Under 17s totals	40,439	76,043	61,852	62,171	43,700	26,555
Barton	Free Swimming Programme commenced April 2009				6,988	3,290
BLP					1,683	643
Ferry					10,975	4,350
Hinksey					2,781	2,425
TCP					8,415	3,525
Over 60s totals					30,842	14,233
% change on previous year	-	88% increase (Under 17's)	19% reduction (Under 17's)	0.5% increase (Under 17's)	42% reduction (Under 17's)	24% increase YTD (both groups)

Note – Much of the apparent reduction in usage during 2009/10 is in the main believed to be due to the changeover in the management information system believed that resulted in free swimming being poorly recorded over the summer period.

1.5 Historical fee comparison:

Prior to the introduction of the Free Swimming Programme over 60's paid a concessionary swimming fee of £2.00 equal to that of under 17's swimming. This offered a 43% reduction against the standard swimming charge. There was no further concessionary discount for under 17's. If they also met any of the concessionary bonus slice criteria they were then entitled to further discount paying the concessionary rate of £1.20.

	Adult	U17 / Over 60	Concessionary Bonus Membership
	2009/10		
Normal rate for a Casual Swimming	£3.50	£2.10 (£3.10 at Hinksey)	£1.20

Table 1 – fee comparison

2.0 Benefits

- 2.1 Free swimming has resulted in more swims in Oxford.
- 2.2 An annual sum of £113k is paid to Fusion Lifestyle to cover free swimming costs. Fusion Lifestyle discount the actual cost through their contract.

3.0 Cons

- 3.1 There is minimal evidence as to whether levels of usage are a result of increased frequency of use by current participants, or the attraction of new users.
- 3.2 Children from the poorest fifth of areas in Oxford are less likely, by approximately 5%, to use the free swimming scheme than children in more affluent areas.
- 3.3 Although the majority of councils opted into the Free Swimming Programme and decided to offer free swimming, Oxford is the only Council in Oxfordshire to offer free swimming. As a result Oxford City tax payers are subsidising non residents who travel in to Oxford to swim. In the financial year 2009/ 2010, an estimated 13% of the under 17's and 19% of the over 60's swims were participants from outside of the City.

3.4 To continue the scheme in full costs £113k. While this offer good value for money as it was negotiated when we were agreeing leisure contract with Fusion Lifestyle, there is no budget provision future costs.

3.5 National research suggests that the majority of participants in the Free Swimming Programme would continue to swim if they had to pay.

4.0 Options

4.1 To stop providing free swimming; while this option does not offer a saving, it does protect the council from unbudgeted costs.

4.2 To develop a more targeted free swimming offer (this would need to be financed); the following options have been explored:

- Remove over 60s and keep under 17s blanket free swimming.
- £1 per swim for both groups.
- Remove over 60s and have £1 per swim for under 17s.
- 50p per swim for both groups.
- Remove over 60s and have 50p per swim for under 17s
- Introduced bonus slice charges for all under 17s
- Introduced bonus slice charges for both groups
- Specific session of free swimming - A proposal of 30, 40, 50 and 60hrs per wk of free swimming across the centres - both groups
- Free swimming for under 17s in school holidays only.

4.3 In consultation with the Board Members and Fusion Lifestyle managers, Officers are recommending the option to provide under 17's free swimming (spread across centres), 30hrs per week; with over 60s paying the standard price.

4.4 A potential free swimming timetable (Appendix one), and subsequent estimated leisure management fee requirements are given later in this report. The timetable would be reviewed after three months of operation.

4.5 Outside of a Free Swimming Programme for under 17's, a fee would be in place for all other public swim sessions as per table one.

4.6 The under 17's charge would be equal to a 42% concession against the standard swimming charge. Additionally, there would be the opportunity for under 17's to purchase a Slice Bonus membership card; or if a dependant of those entitled to a concessionary Slice membership, (conditions apply), a 67% reduction against the standard charge would apply.

5.0 Finance

- 5.1 Budget monitoring suggests that the current Free Swimming Programme can be funded until September.
- 5.2 After September 2010, there is no budget available to cover the costs for free swimming and additional budget would have to be found for any option after this date.
- 5.3 The table below sets out the estimated leisure management fee requirements under the costed option U17s: free 30hrs per week (spread across all centres); Over 60s: standard price.

	U17s	Over 60s	Total
U17s: free 30hrs per week (spread across all centres); Over 60s and times outside of the 30 hours of free swimming for under 17's £2.10	£27,580	£0	£27,580

Table 2 – free swimming costs

- 5.4 The figures above are estimates by our leisure management partners, Fusion Lifestyle, for 12 months of provision.

6.0 Equalities impact

- 6.1 The Free Swimming Programme will ensure equitable access through a targeted free swimming timetable for those under the age of 17 years.
- 6.2 A concession against the standard swimming charge would apply for over 60's swimming. Additionally, there would be opportunity for this group to apply for concessionary Slice membership (conditions apply), equalling a 67% concessionary reduction against the standard charge.
- 6.3 The position of restricting the free swimming to residents-only has, in previous years, been deemed to be in breach of the Treaty of Rome and therefore unlawful (the ruling was that "free" services must be made equally available to all EU citizens). However, in recent years there has been a clear trend not to follow this.

7.0 Level of risk

There is a minor level of risk to service provision. Descriptions and mitigation for this level of risk are demonstrated in the Risk Register.

8.0 Recommendations

- 1) That blanket free swimming is removed as of the 1 of September 2010.

- 2) That a targeted Free Swimming Programme is offered for under 17's, (30 hours a week spread across the city's pools), to Oxford City residents as of the 1 September 2010.
- 3) That the City Executive Board recommends to council that £18,600 is added to the leisure budget to fund the revised Free Swimming Programme for the remaining seven months of the year between September 2010 and April 2011 from the council's contingency fund.
- 4) That a revenue budget bid is submitted as part of the 2011/2012 budget process to fund the continued provision of 30 hours per week for under 17's free swimming.
- 5) Introduce a charge to over 60's of £2.10 for casual swimming (£3.10 at Hinksey).

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Version number: 4 FV

Appendix One.

Fusions draft of potential free swimming timetabling for under 17s.

Free Swimming Programme - Risk Register

Risk ID	Risk						Corporate Objective	Gross Risk		Residual Risk		Current Risk		Owner
Category-000-Service Area Code	Risk Title	Opportunity /Threat	Risk Description	Risk Cause	Consequence	Date raised	1 to 6	I	P	I	P	I	P	
SRR-001-CL	Reputation of the Council.	T	The Council will not have the financial ability to continue to offer wider free swimming opportunity.	Withdrawal of national funding.	Reduced Free Swimming offer to targeted groups.	4-Aug-10	3	4	4	2	3	2	3	LC
SRR-002-CL	Funding Implication.	T	Free Swimming funding withdrawn.	No allocated budget.	The Free Swimming Programme either cannot be continued or there is more cost to the Council.	4-Aug-10	6	3	4	3	3	3	3	IB
SRR-003-CL	Reduced opportunity to support the Council's corporate objectives.	T	Reduction in swimming participation by key target groups. Removal of Hinksey from the free swimming offer	Reduced access to swimming	Reduction in the number of participants will not support wider health, well-being and obesity agendas.	4-Aug-10	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	LC
SRR-004-CL	The position of restricting the free swimming to residents-only has, in previous years, been deemed to be in breach of the Treaty of Rome and therefore unlawful.	T	The ruling was that "free" services must be made equally available to all EU citizens	Access inequality.	Legal challenge.	5-Aug-10	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	IB

Appendix One.

Fusions' draft of potential free swimming timetabling for under 17s...

In depth consultation needs to take place between Fusions Divisional Business Manager and facility General Managers to be more aware of potential operational challenges (and opportunities).

As part of the Annual Service Planning process for 2011/12 the thoughts of the leisure Partnership Board members, need to be sought with regard to alterations to pool programmes next year.

Term-time:

Blackbird Leys Swimming Pool:

Mon 5.45pm - 6.45pm, Fri 5.45pm - 6.45pm, Sat 1.30pm - 2.30pm,
Sun 1.30pm - 2.30pm (4 hrs);

Barton Pool:

Mon 3.00 – 4.00pm, Tues 3.30pm - 6.30pm, Thu 3.30pm - 6.30pm,
Sat 1.30pm - 2.30pm, Sun 2.00pm - 3.30pm (9.5 hrs);

Temple Cowley Pool:

Fri 5.15pm - 6.45pm, Sat 10.00am - 12.30pm, Sun 3.00 – 6.00pm (7 hrs)

Ferry Sports Centre:

Mon 3.00pm – 4.00pm, Tues 3.00pm – 4.00pm, Wed 3.00pm – 4.00pm, Thurs
3.00pm – 4.00pm, Fri 3.00pm – 4.00pm, Sat 1.30pm – 4.00pm,
Sun 11.00am-1.00pm (9.5 hrs).

School Holidays:

Blackbird Leys Swimming Pool:

Tues 9.30am-11.30am, Thurs 9.30-11.30am (4 hrs).

Barton Pool:

Mon 3.00pm – 4.00pm, Tues 3.00 - 6.00pm, Wed 3.00 – 4.00pm,
Thu 2.00pm – 5.00pm, Sat 10.00am-12noon (10 hrs).

Temple Cowley Pool:

Mon 10.00am -12noon, Wed 10.00am-12noon, Sat 10.00am-12.30pm,
Sun 9.30am-12.30pm (9.5 hrs)

Ferry Sports Centre:

Tues 1.30pm - 3.00pm, Wed 3.00 – 4.00pm, Fri 1.30pm -3.00pm, Sat 1.30pm
– 3.00pm, Sun 4.00pm – 6.00pm (7.5 hrs).

(NB. Hinksey Outdoor Pool has been excluded at this stage because the use of the outdoor pool tends to be daily and half-daily; the council have requested that Fusion propose a timetable that also includes Hinksey within the same cost envelope).