

**Subject:** Free Swimming Initiative  
**Date of Meeting:** 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010  
**Report of:** The Acting Director of Environment  
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**Wards Affected:** All

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 The Culture, Tourism and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested an update following the end of the Free Swimming Initiative for over 60s and children aged 16 and under.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the success of the Free Swimming Initiative and are advised of the extended version of the scheme as detailed below.

**3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council opted into the Free Swimming Initiative for over 60s and children 16 and under and were one of only two local authorities in Sussex to offer the full scheme to both age groups. The initiative was funded by central government through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and was supported further in Brighton and Hove through funding from NHS Brighton and Hove.
- 3.2 The Free Swimming Initiative was initially planned to be funded for two years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 but in June 2010 the government announced that funding would cease on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010.
- 3.3 Before the end of the initiative, the Council announced that with continued funding from NHS Brighton and Hove, the initiative would

continue for the remainder of the school summer holidays and would be extended for children aged 11 and under until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

- 3.4 The reason for retaining the initiative for children aged 11 and under is that this age group are a key target group for NHS Brighton and Hove in their strategy to tackle childhood obesity in the city.
- 3.5 Officers have undertaken some research into extended initiatives offered by other local authorities across the South East. Of the 18 local authorities researched, 6 extended their existing initiative through the school summer holidays. Brighton & Hove is the only authority to have extended an initiative to the end of the current financial year.

### **Participation levels in Brighton and Hove**

- 3.6 A total of 14,418 children aged 16 and under and 4,778 over 60s were registered for free swimming up until 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010.
- 3.7 There were a total of 79,675 individual swims from children 16 and under and 56,059 from over 60s. When compared to before the initiative started, these figures represent an increase in the number of swims of approximately 24% for those aged 16 and under and 17% for those over 60.

### **Impact of the scheme's withdrawal**

- 3.8 The initiative being prematurely ceased will obviously impact most upon those who enjoyed its benefits i.e over 60s and children aged 16 and under, particularly those on low income. The extent of the impact is difficult to predict and will only become apparent when we see the participation figures over the coming months and are able to make an accurate comparison.
- 3.9 The Council has been able to reduce this impact by extending the initiative until the end of the school summer holidays and also by retaining free swimming for children aged 11 and under until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.
- 3.10 Although there will inevitably be a drop-off in the number of swimmers as a result of the initiative being withdrawn, it is hoped that many of those who have enjoyed free swimming will have developed a swimming habit and will be more likely to continue despite having to pay for it.

### **Plans for the future**

- 3.11 The extended initiative (free swimming for those aged 11 and under) is planned to cease on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. Before this date the Council will

consult with NHS Brighton and Hove to explore what future funding might be available and assess the possibility of continuing the initiative in some form.

- 3.12 Regardless of any free swimming initiatives, the King Alfred, Prince Regent and St Luke's continue to operate a concessionary pricing structure designed to help minimise the cost of swimming for people over 60 and children 16 and under.
- 3.13 The Council are also looking to develop a leisure card scheme designed to allow access to facilities at a discounted rate for those residents in receipt of certain state benefits. This should help to improve participation levels and reduce inequality of access to the facilities.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Consultation was undertaken with NHS Brighton and Hove and DC Leisure when considering options to extend the scheme.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.1 Financial Implications**

Residual funding for the 2010/11 financial year totals £133,486, from the remaining DCMS Grant (£67,486) and Brighton & Hove PCT ((£66,000)). The Council has committed £70,581 in payments to DC Leisure for the provision of free swimming, of which £11,323 is for under 11's for the period of September 2010 to March 2011.

The remaining funds of £62,905 will be allocated to the King Alfred Leisure Centre to recompense loss revenue through the provision of free swimming for the year April 2010 to March 2011.

There were 39,268 free swims for under 16s at the King Alfred in 2009/10 and records show that the majority of these were under 11 (97%). If (using the data in section 3.6) it is assumed that 76% of this group would pay to swim, this would equate to a loss of income through free swimming of £71,228. The number of free swims for the over 60 age group in the current financial year was 10,552, if 83% would have paid for the swim this would equate to lost income of £16,378.

Therefore the shortfall in recompense for loss of income to the King Alfred LC would equate to £24,701 which will be met from existing budgets within the department.

*Finance Officer Consulted Name: Derek Mansfield Date 14/9/10*

##### **5.2 Legal Implications**

The actions referred to in this report are considered to be reasonable given the circumstances of the funding situation.

*Lawyer Consulted*

*Name* Bob Bruce

*Date* 13/9/10

### 5.3 Equalities Implications

The cessation of the Free Swimming Initiative has reduced the accessibility of residents to access swimming facilities in Brighton and Hove. However, the extended scheme has minimised this by allowing children aged 11 and under to continue to swim for free until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

### 5.4 Sustainability Implications

None.

### 5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications

Projects have shown that providing physical activity opportunities can help reduce crime within geographical areas. Therefore the withdrawal of free swimming could have a negative impact on the reduction of crime in the city.

### 5.6 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

None

### 5.7 Corporate/Citywide Implications

The withdrawal of free swimming will make the facilities less accessible, particularly to those on low income and will not help towards the Council's objective of providing opportunities for healthy living.