

REPORT TO: Employment Learning & Skills Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 16th November 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health & Community

SUBJECT: Free Swimming

WARD(S) ALL

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide the board with an update report on The Governments Free Swimming Initiative in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) **The Board note the report.**
- ii) **The Board considers whether it requires any further information.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Government launched a four strand policy initiative in the summer of 2008 to provide free swimming at Local Authority swimming pools. The initiative aims to improve participation, health, impact on childhood obesity and help meet the Governments commitment to get two million people more active by the time of the London Olympics. The Governments Policy initiative is to provide free swimming to all those aged 60 and over and to all those aged 16 and under for a two year period starting on 1st April 2009.

3.2 Free swimming has been offered since at ALL general swimming times on pool timetables at: -

- a. Kingsway Leisure Centre
- b. Brookvale Recreation Centre
- c. Runcorn Swimming Pool

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The scheme has four strands

- 1) Free swim 16 and under**
- 2) Free Swim 60 and over**

The free swimming programme started on the 1st April 2009. Those taking advantage of the free swimming have been issued with a “scheme membership” card. This has been used to help manage the scheme and provide information on patterns of use across the Borough. The Maps plotting registrations have been produced (see Appendix). The maps show take up as being spread across the borough with a number of participants residing in Runcorn registering at Kingsway Leisure Centre site. This is probably attributed

to the learning pool provision at Kingsway Leisure Centre.

4.2 Data Collection

Free Swimming at the three centres

		April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
Kingsway	16 + under visits	1611	2359	2357	3594	4134	1728
Leisure	Over 60's visits	637	851	1039	1215	1097	1097
Centre	Cards issued Jnr	1016	1441	1810	2488	3005	*3192
	Cards issued Snr	315	435	513	584	661	*697
Brookvale	16 + under visits	568	662	823	942	1411	524
Recreation	Over 60's visits	69	156	141	281	193	111
Centre	Cards issued Jnr	490	700	696	800	991	*1334
	Cards issued Snr	61	80	79	89	118	*139
Runcorn	16 + under	255	450	456	868	894	385
Swimming	Over 60's	284	309	494	594	417	410
Pool	Cards issued Jnr	181	324	418	599	708	*732
	Cards issued Snr	188	191	221	240	258	*275

* cards issued figure is cumulative

Juniors with a card - All sites 1687 2465 2924 3887 4704 *5258

60+ years with a card – All sites 564 706 813 913 1037 *1111

Based on 2007 Mid Year population figures the number of junior cards issued equates to 20%. However, 25% is a more realistic figure as it takes into account the low number of 0-4 who have registered, this age group have always been free membership cards where not issued immediately, there has also been a reluctance to sign up. Approx 5% of all adults age 60+ years have registered.

4.3 The council has been operating free swimming during the school holidays since 2002. DC Leisure staff at Kingsway Leisure Centre had noted a decrease in the number of junior swimming visits during the school holiday period but an increase in the number of families. Analysis of the 2009 summer participation figures with 2008 does conclude that usage has dropped by approx 8%. However, the number of adults going through during this period has increased by 8%. The Centre has also seen a reduction in vandalism and the number of false fire alarm has reduced drastically, compared to almost daily in 2008.

4.4 **3) Capital Reward Grant.** This grant was only available to those council's that signed up to deliver both free swimming programmes. The grant is calculated on a per capita basis from a total allocation of £10m. Halton was awarded a grant of £36,218 this was used to upgrade the wet changing rooms at Brookvale Recreation Centre. The project was completed in June 2009. Customer feedback has been extremely positive

4.5 **4) Capital modernisation programme.** An annual grant fund of £25m has been made available for two years, ending 31st March 2011. Sport England is

administering this grant programme, which is to be spent on larger projects to improve swimming pools. Bidding for this money is on a competitive basis with approximately 300 authorities eligible to bid. Halton has submitted an application to refurbish the changing facility at Kingsway Leisure Centre into a modern village change. Halton were unsuccessful with its 2008 submission. A decision on 2009 submission is due by the end of 2009.

- 4.6 The programme has been publicised Nationally and locally in order to maximise take up. This has included full page advert in local newspaper, editorials in local press, as well as, Inside Halton, Liverpool Echo and the councils website. Currently 20,000 leaflets are being distributed within schools, Banners are on display outside Leisure Centres and Pop up banners are being used around venues in the borough.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The financial impact on the council will be neutral. If the growth in usage is higher than anticipated then DC Leisure Management Ltd will accept the risk involved, providing that the full grant allocation is paid to them.
- 5.2 Authorities where the grant allocation exceeds costs are permitted to spend the surplus on other swimming initiatives or on swimming lessons. Due to a number of authorities withdrawing from the scheme Halton allocation was increased. DC Leisure had already accepted the risk on the basis of the original sum. The extra allocation is to be used for intensive swimming lessons for those pupils in Year 6 who are unable to swim 10m unaided.
- 5.3 £5,000 Communities for Health Grant was awarded to provide free swimming lessons for those 60 years. This was launched at the end of June. 81 applications have been received approx 30 of which have started lessons. Improved water confidence has already been reported.
- 5.4 The Amateur Swimming Association has recently made available a grant scheme to support free swimming lessons. This will be used to support transport costs against the Year 6 intensive swimming lessons.

6.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Disabled access to Halton's leisure facilities has improved, thanks to a £15,161 capital investment from Halton Council's Aiming High for disabled children programme. A hydraulic bed and portable hoist have been installed at Kingsway Leisure Centre and Brookvale Recreation Centre. A modern hydraulic pool hoist has been fitted at Runcorn Swimming Pool.

7.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**
Develop continued participation in physical activity.

- 7.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills**
Increase participation in line with the Council's sports strategy.
- 7.3 **A Healthy Halton**
Sport and physical activity is generally acknowledged to improve health and well-being, and to contribute to the preventative agenda.
- 7.4 **A Safer Halton**
Free junior swimming has been offered by the council during school holidays since 2001 to combat anti social behaviour. This programme extends this measure.
- 7.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None at this stage.
- 8.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**
- 8.1 The risk that costs will exceed the grant available have been accepted by DC Leisure Management.
- 9.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**
- 9.1 The approach is predicated on an access for all basis. Swimming is considered an inclusive activity.
- 10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**
- 10.1 None.