

REPORT TO: Employment Learning and Skills PPB

DATE: 14 January 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Health &Community

SUBJECT: Free Swimming

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To set out the Governments Policy initiative 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.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

(1) The report be noted.

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.

3.2 Free swimming will be offered in Halton at: -

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

The four strands of the policy are: -

- 3.2.1 **Free swimming for those aged 60 and over.** Free swimming will be provided during periods of general public use, in line with the centres existing programme. Halton has been allocated an annual grant of £31,299 to cover costs.
- 3.2.2 **Free swimming for those aged 16 and under.** Free swimming will be provided during periods of general public use, in line with the centres existing programme. Halton has been allocated an annual grant of £76,200 to cover costs.
- 3.2.3 **Capital Reward Grant.** This grant is 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 has been awarded a grant of £36,218 that needs to be spent on a project that helps to improve participation in swimming.
- 3.2.4 **Capital modernisation programme.** An annual grant fund of £25m has been made available for two years, ending 31st March 2011. Sport England will administer 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.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The free swimming programme will start on the 1st April 2009. Those taking advantage of the free swimming offer shall be issued with a “scheme membership” card. This will be used to help manage the scheme and provide information on patterns of use across the Borough.
- 4.2 The Government had stipulated that free swimming will be provided at times that are already designated for general public swimming. This is designed to create minimum disruption to the operation of the pools. However if attendances increase alterations to the programme may need to be made to ensure minimum disruption to existing users and the maximum take up amongst the over 60's and 16's and unders.
- 4.3 The programme will be publicised closer to the implementation date in order to maximise take up. Authorities where the grant allocation exceeds costs are permitted to spend the surplus on other swimming initiatives or on swimming lessons.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A total of 300 authorities have signed up to offer free swimming to those aged 60 and over. While 296 authorities have also signed up to offer free swimming to those aged 16 and under. This National policy also implements the council's policies on health, equality and community safety.

6.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 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. If the costs in running the programme are less than the grant allocation then the surplus will be spent on promoting swimming at the three participating centres.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Develop continued participation in physical activity.

7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Increase participation in line with the Council's sports strategy and Governments objective to leave an "Olympic" legacy.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

Improve the health of the over 60's, combat childhood obesity levels.

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 will extend this measure.

7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 The risk that costs will exceed the grant available has been accepted by DC Leisure Management.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 The programme removes any financial barriers to participation on the basis of age. The council operates The Halton Leisure Card scheme that is designed to remove financial barriers to participation by offering half price admissions to groups facing financial hardship.