

CABINET

15 October 2008

FREE SWIMMING FOR CHILDREN AGED 16 AND UNDER

REPORT OF HEAD OF CULTURAL SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 1721 - River Park Leisure Centre: Free Swimming for Over 60s and Children Aged 16 and Under, 17 September 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report gives details of two new grants from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) designed to increase levels of healthy activity among young people, and to provide a lasting legacy for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. These consist of revenue allocations to facilitate free swimming by children aged 16 and under, and capital contributions to help modernise swimming pool provision for those authorities participating in the Government's free swimming initiatives. The report sets out the action taken so far in connection with these grants, and the further immediate action needed to secure them if the Council is to participate in this initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That, subject to receipt of the grant from Government set out in paragraph 6 of this report and written confirmation from DC Leisure (Solent) Ltd of their agreement to underwrite the scheme, free swimming be introduced at River Park Leisure Centre in 2009/10 and 2010/11 for children aged 16 and under.
- 2 That, subject to Members' approval of the above recommendation, the Head of Legal Services be authorised to revise the existing management contract with DC Leisure (Solent) Ltd to reflect the funding arrangements for the scheme;

- 3 That, subject to Members' approval of the first recommendation, the Head of Cultural Services, in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Portfolio Holder for Heritage Culture and Sport, be authorised to submit a capital bid for 2009/10 to the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and that a further report be brought to Cabinet regarding implementation of this bid, if successful.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Government has recently announced funding for local authorities to promote free swimming in certain priority age groups, namely those aged 60 and over and children aged 16 and under. This programme supports national efforts to increase levels of physical activity and so levels of health and wellbeing. It is also part of the Government's efforts to ensure a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- 1.2 Following consideration of the relevant funding arrangements in September, Cabinet recommended the introduction of free swimming for those aged 60 and over. 300 councils across the UK have now committed to this initiative.
- 1.3 On 7 October, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport wrote to chief executives to confirm the allocations for the initiative for children aged 16 and under. This report sets out how that funding is to be allocated and the implications for the Council if it decides to participate.

2 Background

- 2.1 Preliminary details of the free swimming programme were received by local councils in early August 2008. The scheme, which only applies to local authority-owned pools, has been designed to help achieve successful delivery of National Indicator targets relating to health and wellbeing. The programme comprises two initiatives to increase swimming participation, one of which targets those aged 60 and over, and the other aimed at children aged 16 and under. Funding is to be made available by Government to relevant local authorities for both initiatives, although the arrangements for allocating funding differs between the two.
- 2.2 Whilst the allocations to support free swimming for those aged 60 and over were determined at the outset by DCMS, those for children aged 16 and under are based on the number of councils who expressed an interest in September 2008. The actual amount of grant for children's swimming was therefore not known by officers until 7 October. There is a tight turn-around for formal responses from councils to meet the Government deadline of 24 October 2008.

- 2.3 In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Sport, officers returned an expression of interest in the initiative for those aged 16 and under by the September deadline. 296 local authorities in total are known to have expressed interest. For this, as for swimmers aged 60 and over, there can be no residency criteria imposed by the Council to limit use of the pool.
- 2.4 In addition, Government is providing a capital contribution towards projects designed to modernise swimming pool provision to reward those authorities which sign up to both free swimming schemes.

3 Benefits of the Free Swimming Programme

- 3.1 Such an initiative has potential to deliver directly on Local Area Agreement priority indicators around child obesity (NI56), mental and emotional health (NI51) and similar indicators in the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is very likely that increased child participation in healthy activity might encourage further participation by adults in the family, so contributing positively to progress against other health and wellbeing indicators.
- 3.2 The free swimming programme directly supports Winchester's Framework for 2012, which is designed to ensure that the communities of the Winchester District are able to benefit from the opportunities generated by the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. The third objective of this Framework is:
- “to use 2012 as a means to involve, celebrate and enhance the wellbeing of the young and the older people of our Winchester District.”*
- 3.3 Access to free swimming for local people is a positive step at a time when domestic costs are rising rapidly and household finances are increasingly stretched.
- 3.4 Moreover, if the Winchester District participates in both schemes it will receive a 'reward' allocation of £25,020 in 2008/09 to improve the swimming pool provision at River Park Leisure Centre. This is based on a pro-rata share (per head of population) of a total national pot of £10 million. In addition, the Council will be eligible to submit further bids in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

4 Possible Drawbacks

- 4.1 The DCMS allocation is a reasonable one, but officers had been concerned that it would leave a shortfall to be carried by the City Council. Urgent discussions have taken place with DC Leisure (Solent) Ltd – who are the contractors responsible for managing the centre – and these have led to a verbal agreement that DC Leisure (DCLS) will fund this shortfall on the basis that it will generate secondary spend from the visits. Clearly, this commitment needs to be received in writing by the Council before confirmation of participation is returned to DCMS.

- 4.2 As the programme is a two year trial, there is a possibility – particularly in view of the current economic situation – that the Government could withdraw funding for one or all of the schemes at the end of 2010/2011. This could leave the Council with a difficult situation if it felt obliged to provide funding to prolong the scheme after this two year period. However, in the run up to London 2012 this would be inconsistent with stated Government legacy objectives.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 The report relates to the key objective of Safe and Strong Communities, particularly ‘promoting health and wellbeing by ... making full use of the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and The Cultural Olympiad as a catalyst to increase participation in sporting and cultural activities’.
- 5.2 It also supports the objective of being an Efficient and Effective Council, in terms of providing access to additional capital funds from Government which may reduce calls on the Council’s own capital budget.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 To support the free swimming initiative for those aged 16 and under in the Winchester District, the Government has identified a grant of £54,899. This sum will cover the majority of the costs of implementing free swimming for children aged 16 and under. Any shortfall - estimated at around £5,000 by DCLS – will be met by DCLS, so there will be no cost to the Council for introducing the initiative at River Park Leisure Centre.
- 6.2 Although Members asked at the September Cabinet meeting for officers to consider including provision for free swimming for adults accompanying children who qualify for free swimming, DCLS does not feel able to support such additional costs. Given other budgetary pressures at this time, officers have not pursued this possibility as it was not felt to be a priority growth item.
- 6.3 The capital contribution ring fenced for Winchester in 2008/09 should both free swimming schemes be introduced is £25,020. This could be used to pay for some of the works needed to the swimming pool roof. The DCMS programme requires monies to be committed and drawn down by the end of the financial year.
- 6.4 The capital funding scheme for 2009/10 and 2010/11 has a requirement to be ‘participation-led’ and not ‘facility-led’. It is not clear at this stage whether it could be used to offset the remaining costs of the swimming pool roof repairs, which are estimated in total at £180,000 and already included in the capital programme.

- 6.5 To benefit from this scheme, officers will have to follow a formal bidding process via Sport England who are managing it on behalf of the DCMS. The deadline for first stage applications for 2009/10 is 24 October 2008, so Members are asked to delegate authority to the Head of Cultural Services, in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Portfolio Holder for Heritage Culture and Sport, to submit a bid for this funding, with a further report back to Cabinet in due course.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter from DCMS to Chief Executives, 7 October 2008 – held in the Cultural Services Division

APPENDICES

None