

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**7 APRIL 2009**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: FREE SWIMMING**

Report from: Robin Cooper – Director Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

This report is in response to a request from Councillor Godwin and provides information on the free swimming programme offered to children under 16 and people over the age of 60.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 Under Medway's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Godwin has asked that an item on this issue is included on the agenda for this meeting.
- 1.2 The free swimming initiative will assist in realising Medway's cultural ambitions, will help to encourage healthy lifestyles and achieve our targets around adult participation in sport (NI8) and obesity.

#### **2. Member's Item request**

- 2.1 Councillor Godwin's request is:  
"The Government recently introduced free swimming for under 16s and over 60s, and Medway Council has taken up the scheme. However, councillors have been contacted by residents stating that the hours that unaccompanied children can now attend certain pools has been restricted.

Looking at every council swimming pool in the borough:

- What were the original times that children were allowed in?
- What are they now?

If there is a discrepancy, the original times should be re-introduced. Any restriction on hours is counter to the aims of the initiative, and means that the Council is accepting money from the Government but then restricting access.”

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) wrote to all local authorities in 2008 inviting them to take up the proposed Free Swimming Programme, offering free swimming for the under 16s and over 60s.
- 3.2 The offer was made in the form of a grant for financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11, with further funding for financial year 2011/12 and subsequent years subject to the outcome of the next Spending Review.
- 3.3 On 27 January 2009, Cabinet decided to take up the offer from DCMS, and further, to accept an offer from NHS Medway to fund the early implementation of the scheme, in an excellent example of partnership working to secure joint outcomes.
- 3.4 As a result, free swimming for the under 16s and over 60s was introduced across all Medway managed swimming pools on 5 January 2009. Medway is one of very few Councils in the South East to introduce the scheme in April, and one of only a handful of Councils in the country to implement the scheme early.

### **4. Scheme Take Up**

- 4.1 The scheme has been a phenomenal success with an increase of 100% in under 16s and 57% in over 60s participating in the scheme compared to the same period last year.
- 4.2 However, the success of the scheme has resulted in some disruption for other swimmers at certain times. As a result, small changes have had to be made to swimming programmes to ensure the needs of all our customers continue to be met. These changes have been made primarily to ensure specific customer groups can continue to enjoy the facilities such as parent and baby sessions, family sessions and swimming classes.

- 4.3 These adjustments to the programme are kept under weekly review to ensure the free swimming programme's continued success, but also to accommodate the needs of all our customers. It is also expected that some of the increased demand for swimming will be met at the Black Lion when that comes fully back into use in April.
- 4.4 A timetable of the swimming programme is attached at Appendix A.

## 5. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Health and Safety Risk C2.  [Likelihood – C (Significant) Impact – 2 (Critical)]	Increased numbers of swimmers raises the possibility of potential mishaps.	Control exerted through programming changes to reduce the likelihood of this occurring.

## 6. Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 The provision of free swimming has been met by funding from NHS Medway, Government and from within current budget provision.
- 6.2 There are no legal implications contained within this report.

## 7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to endorse the management actions taken to ensure the continued success of the free swimming programme in Medway.

### Lead officer contact

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### Background papers

Cabinet Report – 27 January 2009

## Appendix A

### Timetable of swimming programme

#### 1 Black Lion

The introduction of an adult only session between 12 - 1.30pm daily.

A parent and child session 12 - 1.30pm daily in the teaching pool (under 8's when accompanied by an adult for use of the teaching pool only.)

Brought forward the adults only session in the evenings from 7pm (previous start was at 8pm.)

The introduction of a family splash and inflatable session, weekends 4pm - 6pm for any child when accompanied by an adult.

An additional session from 7pm - 8pm was introduced for parents and under 8's in the teaching pool.

#### 2 Splashes

##### Monday

The introduction of a family session 5pm - 6pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

##### Tuesday

The introduction of a family session 3pm - 5pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

##### Wednesday

The introduction of a family session 5pm - 7pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

##### Thursday

The introduction of a family session 3pm - 5pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

##### Friday

The introduction of a family session 3pm - 5pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

##### Saturday

The introduction of a family session 10am - 12midday (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

### Sunday

The introduction of a family session 5pm - 7pm (under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.)

All other sessions remain unchanged.

Due to the overwhelming popularity of the free swimming initiative at Splashes 2 hourly sessions have been introduced during school holidays and weekends. On entry customers are issued with a colour wristband, when the colour is called over the PA system the session is concluded.

### **3** Strood

No changes to weekdays Monday - Friday before 4pm and no changes on Sundays.

Monday - Friday between 4pm - 6pm adults only + accompanied children (swimming teachers were unable to instruct due to increased noise levels.)

Saturday changed to session times for group activities so that all customers can use the pool.

### **4** Hoo

No changes to programme Monday - Friday until 5pm. 5pm - 7.25pm adults and accompanied children.

Saturday and Sunday Adult only sessions 3pm - 4.40pm.