

Report of the Corporate Director**FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME****1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress made to identify means to permit the continuance of the free swimming programme at the Waendel Leisure Centre until 31/03/2011.
- 1.2 This report relates to the achievement of the following Council objectives:
- (a) Reducing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
 - (b) Improving life chances for young people
 - (c) Delivering efficient and responsive services

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 Central government grant funding for the free swimming programme is being summarily withdrawn from 31/07/10, eight months earlier than scheduled. A member working group has been considering whether the Council can make up the shortfall of £66,000 of funding necessary to continue the scheme.

3 Appendices

None

4 Proposed Action

- 4.1 **Members RESOLVE to note that following the unscheduled withdrawal of central government grant the Council is unable to fund the continuance of the free swimming programme for under 16s and over 60s at the Waendel Leisure Centre after 31 July 2010.**

5 Background

- 5.1 On 01/09/08 the Community Committee gave approval for the Council to participate in national two year programme of targeted free swimming at Waendel Leisure Centre. In order to qualify for the entitlement for free swimming customers had to be either aged under 16 or over 60. The programme commenced on 01/04/09.
- 5.2 The costs of the programme were to be covered by a central government grant of £69,000 per annum. However it was anticipated that additional costs would be incurred by the Council's contracted operator of the leisure centre – DC Leisure. Therefore on 02/09/10 the Resources Committee gave approval for £20,000 per annum of funding to be made available to cover these additional costs.
- 5.3 Between 01/04/09 and 31/03/10 11,000 people registered at Waendel to join the scheme. In the same period DC Leisure staff recorded 48,500 swims by under 16's and 15,300 swims by over 60's. This represented an increased uptake of 2.2% in respect of numbers swimming compared to the 2008/9 financial year.

- 5.4 On 17/06/10 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced that the grant for programme would cease on 31/07/10, the funding falling victim to the emergency budget measures introduced by the new Government.
- 5.5 The news of the withdrawal of the grant was shared with the Community Committee at their meeting on 21/06/10. Having debated the matter the committee resolved that
- (a) "Officers be instructed to identify proposals for continuing to fully fund the free swimming programme until 31/03/11, and to present these to Resources Committee at their meeting on 21/07/10;"
 - (b) "A working group be established to which all members of the Community Committee would be invited to advise officers on the development of proposals for continuing to fully fund the free swimming programme until 31/03/11 and to present these to Resources Committee at their meeting on 21/07/10.
- 5.6 The working group met on 01/07/10 to discuss the situation. The group comprised of the following persons
- (a) Cllr Waters (chairman), Cllr Graves, Cllr Perkins, Cllr Dean, Cllr Patel,. In advance of the meeting Cllr Ainge submitted a statement which was read out to the working group.
- 5.7 At the working group meeting the following points were considered
- (a) That the cost of continuing to provide the scheme until the scheduled finish of 31/03/11 was estimated to be £66,000.
 - (b) That take up of the scheme in its first year had been relatively modest and consequently represented a poor return on the money invested; each additional free swim costing approximately £40.
 - (c) That for approximately every one over 60's free swim in the first year there had been two under 16's free swims.
 - (d) That DC Leisure were required to give one month's notice of closure to registered users of the free swimming scheme and that the notification process had commenced on 01/07/10.
 - (e) Before free swimming was introduced the standard charges for swimmers under 16 and over 60 was set at the £1.55 per swim – a concessionary rate, the standard charge being £3.10.
 - (f) A VAT increase of 20% will be imposed from 04/01/11 on fees and charges for all services, including swimming.
 - (g) That Councils in Corby, Daventry are Northampton extending their free swimming programmes to the end of the summer holidays.

6 Discussion

- 6.1 The group discussed the proposals to secure the required £66,000 of funding. It was noted that there was no spare capacity of this magnitude within the Council's budget.
- 6.2 The group considered alternative sources of funding from external agencies and programmes and it was agreed that these would be investigated. However it was noted that there was only a negligible probability of securing the necessary external funding before the scheme closed on 31/07/10.

7 Legal Powers

- 7.1 s19 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

7.2 s111 Local Government Act 1972

7.3 s2 Local Government Act 2000

8 Financial and value for money implications

8.1 Unbudgeted funding of £66,000 is required to fund the continuation of the scheme at the present levels.

9 Risk analysis and Implications

Nature of risk	Consequences if realised	Likelihood of occurrence	Control measures
1 Rise in incidence of anti-social behaviour associated with under 16s	1 Lowered quality of life for local people	1 Low	1 Promotion of positive activities for under 16s
2 Rise in levels of obesity related illness in over 60s	2 Lowered quality of life for local people	2 Low	2 Promotion of physical activities for the over 60's
3 The Council is blamed by the public for the closure of the scheme	3 Complaints about and criticism of the Council	3 Medium	3 Media and other public information regarding the reasons for the scheme's closure

10 Implications for Resources

None

11 Implications for Stronger and Safer Communities

Leisure and Sporting facilities provide a safe and controlled environment in which the community can undertake healthy and social activities. Sporting programmes can also assist in providing diversionary activities and reduced anti-social behaviour.

12 Implications for Equalities

D C Leisure has policies in place to ensure equality of opportunity, ensuring that activities and employment opportunities at their sites are accessible to the whole community.

13 Author and Contact Officer

Terry Wright, Corporate Director

14 **Consultees**
Joe Hubbard, Deputy Chief Executive
Michael Hudson Acting Head of Financial Services
Liz Flores Cultural Development Manager

15 **Background Papers**
Previous committee reports
Background papers