

Report to: Children's Services Young People
and Sport Scrutiny

Date:

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Report No: 15

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Report Title: Free Swimming for 16 years old and under

Non Confidential: (***Non-Confidential***) This report does **not** contain information that warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose: This report advises the Scrutiny Committee of the uptake and impact of the free swimming initiative for 16 year olds and under.

Recommendations:

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

Signed:

Leader / Executive Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

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Summary:

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Background

On 2nd July 2007, The Executive approved the introduction of free swimming for 16 year olds and all leisure activities for over 65s at all of the sports and leisure centres operated by Bolton Community Leisure Trust (i.e. the former Council run leisure centres) and the Council run leisure centres (i.e. the Excel centre and Jubilee Pool), commencing with the start of the July school summer holidays, i.e. from the 21st July 2007. This report provides an update on the uptake and impact of the free swimming initiative by 16 year olds and under.

Bolton Community Leisure Sites

The introduction of free swimming for 16 years old and under has proved to be a great success. During the first six weeks of the 2007 summer holiday period, there were over 32,000 visits compared to only 13,634 in the same period during 2006. Farnworth was the most popular site with almost 14,000 visits whilst Turton had the biggest increase with more than three times as many visits than in 2006. The most popular weeks were the first two weeks of the holiday when demand exceeded the pool availability at all sites at certain times of the day. The total number of free swims from July to December 07 was 50,699 compared to 39,016 for the same period in 2006 - an increase of 29.94%.

Bolton Council Sites

The remaining Council managed swimming facility i.e. Jubilee Pool, also saw a significant increase in usage figures over the summer holiday period. The total number of under 16s swims for the Jubilee Pool in the summer of 2007 was 1113 compared to 546 in 2006. The total from July to December 2007 was 2021 compared to 1277 in 2006 - an increase of 58.26%.

Future Considerations

A number of points have been learned from the introduction of the free swimming initiative and changes have been made or will be made, especially during future holiday periods. These include the use of a band system to limit access to 1 hour at peak times, and the programming of adult only swimming sessions. The introduction of free swimming has had an impact on the number registering for the swimming lessons and the £5 top up swimming lessons offered to those children that cannot swim 25m in Years 4, 5 and 6. Funding for the £5 top up programme comes to an end in March 2008 and as a result this may have an impact on the number able to take advantage of free swimming in the future.

Officers from the Council's Sport Health and Inclusion Service, School Sports Partnership and Bolton Community Leisure Trust have met to discuss future considerations and developments for the free swim and activities programme, in response to the points highlighted above and other observations made over the last six months. These include examples of where parents have taken advantage of the free swimming programme by taking their children out of formal swimming lessons, with the aim of teaching their youngsters to swim themselves. This can be a very positive family learning experience but will need to be monitored to ensure that minimum swimming standards are being met.

The overall swimming programme itself will be reviewed in order to accommodate increased participation during term time or non holiday periods. The review will identify how the free swimming initiative will operate alongside the current day to day swimming lessons and swimming

club programme. The initiative also needs to retain the priority of equality of access in order to ensure that customers are not excluded from swimming activity - e.g. people with disabilities - due to pools being at capacity on a much more regular basis.

The initiative will be the subject of ongoing marketing and PR publications by both the Council and Bolton Community Leisure trust.

Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been subject to an initial screening of Equality Impact Assessment and no adverse impacts were identified.

Recommendation

The Children's Services and Young People and Sport Scrutiny Committee is asked note the uptake and progress made on the free swimming initiative for young people aged 16 years and under.