

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 11 September 2008  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Health & Community  
**SUBJECT:** Government Policy for Free Swimming  
**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To consider the Governments proposal to offer free swimming to all people over 60 and to all those aged 16 and under at public swimming pools.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) The Council confirms its participation in the proposal to offer free swimming to the over 60's in Halton. That the scheme is reviewed in two years time when the funding ceases.**
- ii) The Council submits an expression of interest in participating in the scheme to offer free swimming to those aged 16 and under, but that the council's participation in this scheme is conditional on the terms and financial offer yet to be made by Government.**
- iii) Subject to satisfactory grant terms and conditions The Strategic Director, Health and Community and Portfolio holder for Environment, Leisure and Sports are granted delegated authority to determine and submit applications for capital monies as defined in the proposals.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Government is promoting a policy of free swimming to the over 60's and to those aged 16 and under. The policy is to promote recreational swimming, address health issues and meet its "Olympic" pledge to get more people engaged in sport and recreation. The Government has set a deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> September 2008 by which the council must respond if it wishes to participate in the scheme.

3.2 The council received a letter and outline details of the proposal on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2008. The proposals offer financial support from four different "pots" of money. This funding is available for two years only: -

### **3.2.1 Free swimming for those aged over 60.**

This is a £15M p.a. fund spread across the whole country. Halton's allocation has been set at £31,299 p.a. Swimming is already offered at half price to all those over 60 through the Halton Leisure Card. On current levels of casual use the fund will cover the additional subsidy. It is also sufficient to fund the anticipated increase in usage the scheme is designed to produce.

DC Leisure offer membership packages that include swimming in the overall price. Currently there are only 24 people over 60 who have purchased one of these packages. This will need to be negotiated with the company but is unlikely to have a significant financial impact.

If the allocation is taken up the over 60's may be drawn to the council's facilities from other pools operated by private companies or community groups. These will include operators such as JJB and Chestnut Lodge School. This is the main risk associated with this scheme.

### **3.2.2 Free swimming for those aged 16 or under**

This pot is £25M spread over two years. Grant allocations to Local Authorities and the terms of grant have not yet been published. However it is understood that The Government is waiting to gauge the level of interest before providing further details. The fund is designed to provide free casual swimming within the centres existing programmes of use.

Halton already provides half price swimming for all under 18 year olds and free swimming for juniors during the school holidays through the SPLASH scheme.

Registering an expression of interest will not commit the council if the terms of the grant are ultimately less than favourable.

### **3.2.3 Capital reward fund**

This is a fund of £10M that will be available in 2008/09. It is available only to authorities who sign up to both of the above schemes for over 60's and under 16's free swimming. The fund is designed to modernise pool provision and will be allocated to authorities on a per capita basis. Expenditure and participation in this fund is conditional and subject to the terms and conditions of the grant.

### **3.2.4 Capital challenge fund**

This is a fund of £25M available in 2009/10 and 2010/11. The fund is

for swimming pool improvements and development. It will be administered by Sport England who will produce a prospectus for funding applications. The closing date for fully worked up and costed applications is **15<sup>th</sup> October 2008**.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The proposed scheme is consistent with the council's policies on health, safer Halton, anti poverty and sport.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 It should be noted that the funding is for two years only. At the end of this period the council will be faced with the prospect of either funding the scheme if it is to continue or reverting back to existing charging policies.

5.2 From the information currently available it is clear that if council's pursue these schemes and incur a financial shortfall then it is a the council's own risk. However if the level of grant exceeds the cost of providing the set schemes the council's will be able to use the money to promote swimming initiatives in the community.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

Children under 17 will be major beneficiaries of the proposal.

##### **6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The proposal is consistent with the sports strategy and PI's to increase participation in sport and recreation.

##### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

The proposals are consistent with improving physical activity to reduce the incidence of obesity and conditions resulting from sedentary life styles.

##### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

Halton already offers free swimming to children as part of its school holiday SPLASH scheme to reduce youth nuisance and anti social behaviour.

##### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

Any capital funding utilised would improve the physical facilities and

fabric of the buildings.

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The risks are mainly financial and are outlined in 5 above. If the scheme is withdrawn in two years time public reaction may be poor.

7.2 The financial implications of the over 60's scheme can be estimated by analysing the council's current usage figures. However the number of people who will leave private or other community swimming pools to take advantage of this offer is unknown.

7.3 Other private operators or community groups may loose income as they are drawn to Council operated or contracted services.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The scheme as proposed will help to address health, financial and access inequalities.

**12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Government proposal letter	Runcorn Town Hall	John Hatton Divisional Manager