



## CABINET REPORT

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>FREE SWIMMING – ONE YEAR ON</b>
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Cabinet Meeting Date:</b>	<b>19 May 2010</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Listed on Forward Plan:</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Within Policy:</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Policy Document:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Environment &amp; Culture</b>
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Councillor Paul Varnsberry</b>
<b>Ward(s)</b>	<b>All</b>

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with a summary of how Northampton BC Leisure Services have performed during the first year of the Government Free Swimming Initiative and to provide supporting comprehensive analysis of usage.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the contents of this report be noted.

### 3. Issues and Choices

#### 3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Free swimming is a £140m funded cross-Government initiative promoted by the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS), to enable local councils in England to offer free swimming to people aged 60 and over and 16 and

under. Swimming is the countries most popular participation sport and the initiative was launched as a key part of the plans to secure a long-term legacy from London hosting the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and to get two million people more active, healthy and participating in swimming on a regular basis..

- 3.1.2 Free swimming began on 1 April 2009 and it is anticipated that it will run for at least two years until 31 March 2011.
- 3.1.3 A total of 261 councils are offering free swimming for people over 60 with 199 Councils also offering it for young people aged 16 and under. Northampton Borough Council Leisure Services opted to provide free swimming to both groups.
- 3.1.4 Within Northamptonshire, Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Daventry and Northampton are all offering free swimming. South Northants Leisure Trust (SERCO), (Brackley and Towcester pools) and Cultural Community Partnerships, East Northants (Rushden and Thrapston pools) opted not to participate in the scheme. This has undoubtedly benefitted Danes Camp in particular as the only leisure pool in the County to offer free swimming.
- 3.1.5 Funding allocations to councils for free swimming are calculated on the basis of population.
- 3.1.6 To benefit from the initiative users are required to have either a casual leisure card which has been issued **free of charge** for free swimming or a full leisure card. Attendance figures are collated using the card and reported to the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), on a quarterly basis..
- 3.1.7 A total of 131,619 free swims have been taken in Northampton during the first twelve months that the scheme has been running. To date 28,094 customers have signed up for free swimming with 24,718 of those 16 and under.
- 3.1.8 At the end of the third quarter Northampton was ranked 26<sup>th</sup> out of 261 local authorities participating and in 22<sup>nd</sup> place for 16s and under alone.
- 3.1.9 Northampton Borough Council, with its three pools at Danes Camp, Lings Forum and Mounts Baths, is ranked as the highest non-Metropolitan District council in the country for under sixteen's free swim attendance and is in second place within the East Midlands region after Leicester City Council. This ranks Northampton above large cities like Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle illustrating that the take up by the people of Northampton is outstanding in terms of population and number of pools.

## 3.2 Issues

### 3.2.1 Pool re-programming to improve customer experience

The initial inundation of swimmers in April 2009 led to large queues outside leisure facilities and we found we had to rethink how we provided swimming and revised the pool timetable..

In consultation with our customers we moved away from just long periods of general swimming to shorter targeted sessions that helped signpost customers to come at times more appropriate for them. This included family swims where all children had to be accompanied by an adult, general swim sessions where teenagers could swim on their own, under 8's sessions where parents could bring their little ones to quieter sessions and 50+ swims for the over 60's to take advantage of the free swimming initiative. We also scheduled more breaks in the sessions to allow cleaning of changing rooms and re-stocking of vending machines. The programme has worked well for both customers and staff.

### 3.2.2 Administration of Scheme

The success of the free swimming initiative in Northampton brought with it major problems in terms of administering the scheme. Each person wishing to access free wishing has to complete a registration form and is issued with a casual leisure card, or alternatively, customers can purchase a full leisure card which gives a range of concessions on all activities. The leisure card is used to monitor attendance and record customer profile information, e.e. postcode, gender, age, frequency of use.

Processing the large volume of forms received, issuing cards and dealing with the volume of customers at reception have all placed considerable pressures on reception and administrative staff. The increased bather loads have also placed additional pressure on lifeguards in terms of pool safety and cleaning of pools and changing areas. It has been necessary at times to bring in extra staff to ensure that levels of customer service can be maintained.

Providing user cards to 28,000 users has increased the salaries budget considerably due to the administration task.

It is a requirement of the initiative that usage data is provided to the DCMS to enable them to measure the success of the scheme. Our initial request to make a small charge to cover the cost of issuing these cards was refused by the government who felt that they should be issued free of charge by all participating authorities. However, due to overwhelming pressure this decision was eventually reversed immediately prior to free swimming commencing in April 2009. It was felt that it was too late for us to introduce a charge at that point as the scheme had already been publicised. A one off administration charge of £2.00 has however been introduced from April 2010.

### 3.2.3 Financial Impact

	<b>2008/9</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>+/-</b>
Paid swimming income	£415,743	£287,930	<b>-£127,813</b>
Annual Funding from DCMS		£172,231	£44,418
Additional DCMS funding		£11,207	£55,625
Additional costs		<b>£36,000</b>	£19,625
Additional income		£27,500	£47,125

The above table shows that paid swimming income was £127,813 down on the previous year but DCMS funding restores this to a positive gain of £55,625.

Free swimming has resulted in additional costs, such as administering user cards, extra life guarding, chemicals and other items, estimated at £36,000, but has also generated additional income from secondary spend, lockers and other activities estimated to be in the region of £27,500.

In addition a further one off grant of £11,207 was received from the DCMS at the end of the financial year as not all of the £25m pot allocated for 16 and under funding had been used.

Overall this is extremely positive with an overall financial gain in the region of £47,125 on the previous year rather than the forecasted loss of income.

A further capital funding allocation was also awarded to those councils offering free swimming to both age groups. NBC Leisure Services received a grant of £60,637, which funded modernisation of existing swimming pool changing rooms at Lings Forum Leisure Centre.

A detailed financial analysis is attached at Appendix 1.

### **3.2.4 Free Swimming Lessons**

Additional funding has been made available to those authorities offering free swimming to both age groups, to provide free swimming lessons to key target groups. The Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) has administered this through a bidding process. Funding has been successfully obtained to offer a total of 100 free lessons during 2009/10 with a further 350 places available during the 2010/11 financial year.

### **3.2.5 Visit Analysis**

Full analysis of usage is attached at Appendix 2. Keys issues are summarised below:

28,094 free swimming cards have been issued and used since March 2009 – the majority of these to juniors.

The three leisure centres recorded 131,619 free swims from April 2009 to March 2010 as opposed to only 76,241 from the two age groups the year before.

Total swims (including all paid swims) reached up to 271,931 from 225,316 the previous year – an increase of 21%.

Swims by 16's and under rose to 103,886 from 58,817 the year before – an increase of 77%.

Swims by 60's and over increased by 63% to 28,255.

After the first nine months of the scheme (April to December) Northampton were 22<sup>nd</sup> out of the participating 199 authorities for under 16's. When population is taken into account we move above Manchester and Milton Keynes for free swims per 1000 population.

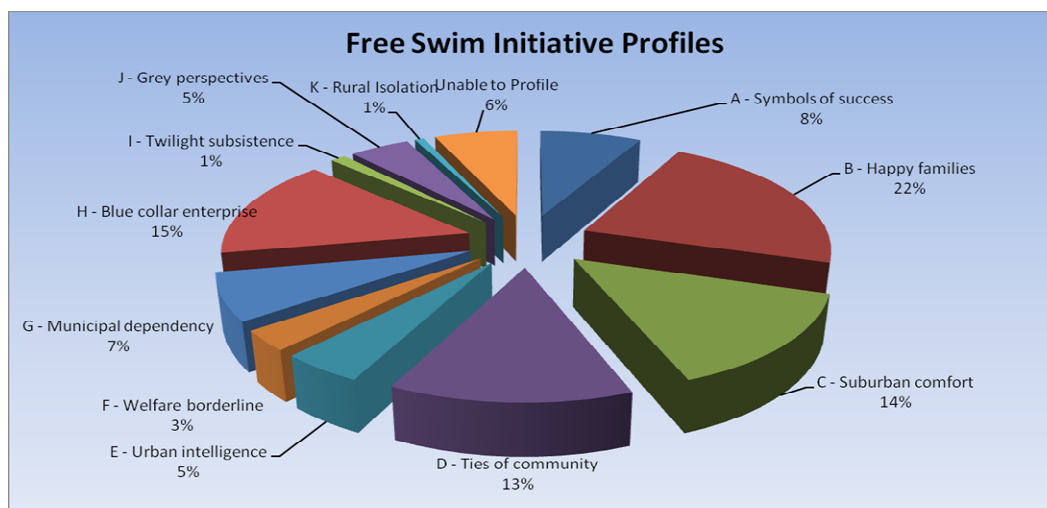
After the first nine months of the scheme Northampton were 87 out of 261 authorities for 60 and over swims. When population is taken into account we move up to 77<sup>th</sup> nationally.

Northampton was 26<sup>th</sup> out of 261 authorities for combined free swims after the first nine months of the scheme. Again when taking population into account we have performed better than many other authorities including Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham – many of whom also have more swimming pools.

One of the unexpected results was that although frequency of visits has increased overall the number of customers only taking advantage of the scheme once was high.

Postcode analysis has shown that by far the greatest percentage of customers came from within the Borough boundaries with 84% of customers coming from NN1 to NN5 postcodes. Of the total visitors 2% actually came from outside Northamptonshire.

Customer profiling carried out based on the first year of the free swim initiative shows, not surprisingly, that the greatest individual percentage of customers (22%) come from Group B, Happy Families – younger couples, generally with children, who enjoy exercise.



Health rankings indicate that those more likely to have poor health are groups H,G,F and I. Groups F, G and H share similar characteristics (heavy smokers/drinkers, low incomes heavy watchers of TV) and in total make up 21,260 households (22.78%) in Northampton. These groups make up 25% of the overall users of the free swim initiative during the first year of the scheme.

In general take up has been poor from individual low incomes groups, F, G and I, and more will need to be done to encourage participation from these groups.

A full Customer Insight Report is attached at Appendix 3.

### **3.1 Choices (Options)**

Cabinet are recommended to review and note the attached financial, visit and profile data.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Policy**

There are no specific policy implications arising from this report.

### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

#### **4.2.1 Financial**

There is the risk that the level of swimming visits may drop off during year two. Research has shown this to be the case in Scotland and Wales where free swimming was introduced earlier than 2009. This could also lead to lower levels of secondary spend and paid swimming income and therefore have financial implications.

During 2010/11 a £2.00 administration charge will be levied on those participating in the scheme. However the facility to upgrade to a full leisure card offering a range of concessions is currently being offered for only a further £2.00.

This offer is only accessible by the under 16's and over 60's!

### **4.3 Legal**

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

### **4.4 Equality**

An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out. There are no specific equalities implications arising from this report.

### **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

No consultation has taken place directly in relation to this report.

## **4.2 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes**

4.2.1 This initiative is a partnership between the Government, DCMS, Local Councils, Sport England and Swimming Governing Body.

4.2.2 Participation in the Free Swimming Initiative contributes to the Council Priority Outcomes of reducing crime & anti-social behaviour, promoting healthy living initiatives and providing a range of leisure and cultural activities.

It also contributes to the Counties aspiration to become the “Fittest County in the Country”.

## **4.3 Other Implications**

There are no other implications arising from this report.

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1 DCMS Free Swimming Programme basic throughput data 1 April to 30 June, 1 July to 30 September, 1 October to 31 December 2009.

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