

CHESHIRE EAST

CABINET

Date of meeting: 4 November 2008
Report of: The Strategic Director - People
Title: Free Swimming to those aged 16 and under and Capital Modernisation Programme – funding offer to Cheshire East Council.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following consultation with Cabinet Members and others an urgent decision was made by the Chief Executive on 24 October 2008 under Council Procedure Rule 25 to approve acceptance of the Government's Free Swimming Programme offer of funding for the 16 and under category and capital improvements. This report provides a framework for implementing the decision.

2.0 Decision Required

- 2.1 To note the Chief Executive's decision.
- 2.2 To approve the actions needed to take the programme forward from April 2009 onwards as set out in Section 7.6 of this report.

3.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs

- 3.1 There are no financial implications for transition costs up to the 1 April 2009.

4.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond

- 4.1 The Government's funding offer for the scheme is initially for a two year period only. In financial year 2011/12 and subsequent years the indications are that any further funding and delivery arrangements would be based on evidence from the previous two financial years.

The offer letter of 7 October from the DCMS indicates a level of funding that falls short of the collective existing level of income from this age category and is set out in section 7.4 of this report.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 No authority is required to enter any element of the programme so there is no new entitlement to free swimming.

6.0 Risk Assessment

- 6.1 As identified in Section 7.4 of this report the offer of funding from DCMS does not cover existing income generated so additional revenue funding streams and partnership activity will need to be identified over the two year period of the funding. The process to address this risk is discussed in Section 7.6 of the report.

7.0 Background and taking the free swimming Programme forward

- 7.1 As Members are aware in June of this year Government announced its intention to fund local Councils to provide free swimming for certain targeted groups with the aspiration of providing free swimming for everyone by 2012. At the end of July, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) sent out letters to all Local Authority Chief Executives outlining the packages that were available to roll out the programme.
- 7.2 On 10 September 2008 Cabinet confirmed its intention that Cheshire East Council wished to participate in the Government's Free Swimming Programme for the 60's and over from 1 April 2009 and a response was made to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to that effect by the deadline of 15 September. The Cabinet also approved an expression of interest to be made to Government on a further element of the scheme, the provision of free swimming for those 16 and under and funding for swimming pool modernisation.
- 7.3 This expression of interest was made and an offer expected from DCMS by 30 September with an invitation from the Council to confirm their participation or otherwise by 15 October. Unfortunately the offer was not received until 7 October with a new deadline for a decision by 24 October. To achieve this deadline and following consultations with Members of Cabinet the Chief Executive had to make an urgent decision under the Council's procedure rules. A copy of the offer letter and funding allocated are attached (Appendices 1 & 2).
- 7.4 A grant allocation offer of £173,410 per annum for two years has been made to Cheshire East Council to provide swimming for those aged 16 and under. As with the 60 and over offer this is again based on a formula taking into account the local population within this age category. The funding offer is as follows:-

Congleton Borough Council	£ 44,181
Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council	£ 58,680
Macclesfield Borough Council	<u>£ 70,549</u>
	<u>£173,410</u>

Having now accepted funding offers for both the 60 and over and 16 and under age categories Cheshire East Council will need to allow free swimming as defined by DCMS. For DCMS free swimming is defined as "meaning people in these age groups who wish to swim at any time throughout the year when they

would normally be admitted to the pool for public swimming, and in accordance with local programming, should not be charged for doing so.” The definition of a public swimming session does not therefore extend to private club hires, swimming lessons, galas or other special events.

- 7.5 On the issue of the capital programme by agreeing to run the free swimming programmes for both categories Cheshire East Council has been offered funding from a £10 million capital programme pot for 2008-09 as follows -

Congleton Borough Council	£21,033
Crewe and Nantwich Borough	£26,350
Macclesfield Borough Council	<u>£34,274</u>
	<u>£81,657</u>

The offer letter from DCMS has indicated that these figures are based on a pro rata population based share of the total available. These funds can be used as project development costs or bids for the next two financial years but cannot be used for partnership funding bids from next year onwards. At any early stage consideration will need to be given as to how this funding will be used.

- 7.6 By opting into the free swimming programme the new Council is sending out a positive message about its support for the health and well being of the local community and the role that such provision plays in achieving this. By extending free swimming to the 16 and under age category a key contribution will be made to supporting the positive outcomes for young people also being addressed by other agencies including the Primary Care Trust and Police. As such every effort will be made to increase partnership working with these agencies to maximise these outcomes. Acceptance also allows the opportunity to access into the capital stream and bidding for the future capital monies programme.

As indicated earlier in the report there will be a shortfall in income for the 16 and under category even at existing levels of usage in the order of £45,000 for the next financial year not including additional costs for staff and pool maintenance. At an early stage there will be a need to examine ways of developing strategies to draw in additional revenues to address this shortfall. Maximum effort will need to be made to increase secondary spend at all leisure centre sites including cross marketing of other leisure and catering activities. In order to manage this process it is recommended that a specific group from within the existing culture and leisure officers be set up and involving the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing to both roll out the implementation of the scheme, its administration and management and develop an action plan to address the income and partnership issues. To ensure that all elements of this programme are fully addressed it is proposed that the group utilises a project management approach and provides updates on progress being made to the Cabinet Advisory Panel for People.

- 7.7 It is clear that whilst a positive message is being sent out in rolling out the programme it needs to be done so by managing customer and media expectations. It is considered that it needs to be made clear to service users on

a regular basis (and this role can be taken by the Working Group) that funding is only guaranteed from the Government throughout the life of the programme, that funding is time limited and that there may need to be an option to reintroduce charges at some stage in the future. It is also clear that this action may be necessary through whatever future management arrangement that Cheshire East Council uses to deliver its cultural and leisure services.

For further information:

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Free Swimming Programme offer letter to Local Authorities

Appendix 2 – Free Swimming Programme Grant Allocations

Background Documents:

Sport England – Free Swimming, Capital Modernisation Prospects

Documents are available for inspection at Macclesfield Town Hall.