

Free Swimming Sessions for Midlothian Children

Report by Garry Sheret, Head of Property and Facilities Management

1 Purpose of Report

This report sets out the implications of introducing free swimming sessions to children during school holidays and provides information regarding the usage of Council leisure facilities during summer holidays.

2 Background

- 2.1** At the Council meeting on 11 August 2015 a Notice of Motion requested that officers bring forward a report to look at how the Council can offer free swimming sessions for children up to the age of 18 years during school holidays.
- 2.2** The motion also requested that the Council should also look at how it can enhance and encourage better use of its leisure facilities during school holiday periods.

3 Leisure Activities

3.1 Current Free Swimming

The Midlothian Library Service Summer Reading Challenge distributes up to 1,000 free swim passes each year with a value of £1,750 per annum. These free swim vouchers are valid from June to December and are intended to encourage children to read six books during the summer holidays.

As a trial, free swimming passes issued to children enrolled for swimming lessons at Newbattle Pool. During the period of the eight week lessons block children are also issued with a pass that enables them to attend the pool free of charge.

3.2 Other Swimming Initiatives

Sport and Leisure are at present progressing the opportunities with Education, Communities and Economy colleagues to implement a Corporate Parenting Tone Zone card that would enable looked after children, and carers access to swimming for £1.00 per session during normal public opening times.

3.3 Holiday Activities

Throughout the school holidays a wide variety of sports and activities are available to ensure children are encouraged to be active and healthy. These sports include gymnastics, athletics, rugby and football together with the regular day to day classes and activities available within leisure centres.

The Active Schools team host activities for children of all ages. The sessions can last for a couple of hours, a half day or even a full day depending on the activity. A copy of the Summer of Sport 2014 Scheme has been placed in the Members Library.

In addition Sports Development Officers offer Football and Rugby holiday camps at various locations linked to local football and rugby clubs.

All activities are run by a dedicated team who are charged with creating and developing new ways to ensure all children and young people have a great time and the opportunity to participate in active sporting experiences.

It is important that these activities continue to be developed and expanded where possible. Sport and Leisure remain committed to the future enhancement and development of opportunities for children to participate in leisure activities during the school holidays and continue to work closely with colleagues across the Council to ensure that communities' needs are being addressed.

3.4 Free School Swimming during School Holidays

The provision of free swimming sessions for young people varies substantially across Scotland. Some providers offer free or discounted swimming during school holiday periods whilst other authorities, don't offer free swimming at all. Some examples from neighbouring Councils are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Comparisons of Neighbouring Authorities' Charges during Summer Holidays

| Trust / Local Authority | Free Under 18 Swimming Time Periods | Charge for Under 18 Swimming |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Midlothian | N/A | £2.10 |
| East Lothian | Mon-Fri, 11.00 am- 4.30 pm | Free |
| West Lothian | Mon-Fri, 10.00 am - 4.00 pm | Free |
| Edinburgh | N/A | £3.00 |
| Scottish Borders | N/A | £2.50 |
| Fife | Mon-Fri, 10.00 am- 5.00 pm | Free |
| Falkirk | N/A | £2.00 |

The introduction of free swimming for children under 18 during school holidays would mean a loss of revenue. Table 2 details the under 18 users and current income levels based on Monday to ~Friday 10.30am to 4.30pm times.

Table 2 – Current Income/Usage during 2014

| Holiday Period 2014 | Under 18 at £2.10 per visit | Gross Income | Vat | Net Council income |
|--|--|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3 - 6 January | 248 | £521 | £181 | £434 |
| 6 -14 February | 1104 | £2,318 | £386 | £1,932 |
| 4 - 22 April | 1811 | £3,803 | £634 | £3,169 |
| 19 May | 129 | £271 | £45 | £226 |
| 3 July to 20 August | 5356 | £11,248 | £1,875 | £9,373 |
| 12 and 15 September | 243 | £510 | £85 | £425 |
| 13 to 17 and – 20 to 21 October | 971 | £2,039 | £340 | £1,699 |
| 22 to 24 December and 29 to 31 December | 231 | £485 | £81 | £404 |
| | 10,093 | £21,195 | £3,533 | £17,662 |

However if free swimming sessions are offered to young people up to age 18 it is estimated that uptake would increase by approximately 10%.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

If the Council decides to introduce fee swimming for children there will be an initial additional publicity material requirement and short term staffing resource requirement. The associated short term revenue costs to cover this, will be met from the existing Sport and Leisure budget.

If free swimming sessions are introduced during the summer holidays it will result in £9,000 in lost revenue based on current participation levels. To allow pool time for adults, classes and other users free sessions be made available from Monday to Friday, 10.30 am to 4.30 pm only.

The free swimming sessions would be available for Midlothian residents and will be managed poolside in one hour sessions. Due to the potential increase in users it may require an increase in supervision which will be monitored and managed at each location by the Duty Officer on a daily basis.

Introducing free swimming sessions to children under 18 years of age during all school holidays, based on 2014 participation levels, would mean a reduction in revenue of around £18,000 per year. To mitigate cost this it is recommended to limit the free sessions to the summer holiday period which will result in a loss of revenue of £9,000.

4.2 Risk

There is a risk of the swimming/leisure experience being devalued and this is an issue that is being experienced in other local authority areas. Other authorities advise that some children tend not to value a service/experience if it is provided free and this can regrettably cause a disruptive element to facility operational management.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

This proposal addresses the Council's aim "to decrease the total percentage of those who never or rarely engage in physical activity".

4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The performance indicator for attendances per 1,000 population for pools would still be monitored by Sport and Leisure and would include free swimming sessions participants.

4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Access to leisure facilities contributes to a Healthy Community for residents of Midlothian.

4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Scottish Swimming's Corporate Plan for 2015 – 2021 states that one of its Strategic Objectives is to increase the number of people of all ages and abilities participating in swimming for health, fitness and fun.

Education, Communities and Economy colleagues are also of the view that offering free swimming during holiday periods will make a contribution to the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Midlothian. Research from Health partners indicates that the proportion of Primary 1 pupils in Midlothian who are overweight or obese has increased from below the Scottish average in 2011/12 to above average in 2013/14.

In the case of overweight children this has increased the figures to 10.2%, which is 1% above Scottish average. The proportions who are severely obese have effectively remained the same over this period.

With around 1,000 children per year of age in Midlothian, these figures indicate that twenty more 5 year olds are overweight, obese or severely obese than two years previously and that action should be taken to halt and reverse this trend. Sport and Leisure are working with Health and other partners to address the issue of obesity in Midlothian both for children and adults.

4.8 Ensuring Equalities

An equality impact assessment has been carried out regarding the proposals as set out in this report which are applicable to all children in Midlothian aged up to 18 years of age.

The equality input assessment has been placed in the members library.

4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

No specific sustainable development issues have been identified.

4.10 IT Issues

There would be an administration resource required to accommodate free swimming sessions and the point of sale system would require to be amended to accommodate the free swimming proposal if approved.

5 Summary

To improve the health and wellbeing of all children in Midlothian the introduction of free swimming sessions is being presented to Council for consideration. If this initiative is supported this will necessitate an adjustment to expected revenue income levels as set out in Section 4.1.

To manage anticipated peak usage periods one hour sessions would be introduced. Any increased supervision and administration which may be required will be managed locally by pool staff under the direction of the Duty Officer.

6 Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:-

- a) Advise if it supports the introduction of free swimming to under 18 Midlothian residents during school summer holidays,
- b) If supported agree that free swimming is limited to one hour sessions, Monday to Friday 10.30 am to 4.30 pm,
- c) If supported instruct the Head of Finance and ISS to adjust the Revenue budget to reflect the reduced income of £9,000 per annum for 2016/17 and beyond.
- d) If supported request that the Head of Property and Facilities Management monitor uptake levels.

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Report Contact:

Tony Malone Tel No 0131 561 6501
tony.malone@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers: