

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
30 SEPTEMBER 2008**

FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines details of the government's free swimming programme and details action taken so far in response to this.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The government recently wrote to councils with initial details of funding available to support free swimming for the over 60s and the 16 and unders. The money is split into four pots.
- 2.2 The first pot of money is to support swimming for the over 60s in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years. This is being divided among district and unitary councils based on their populations of older people. In Exeter's case we have been allocated £32,551. Confirmation of a wish to participate was required by 15 September 2008.
- 2.3 A decision on the allocation of the second pot of money for the 16 and unders has not been made. Instead expressions of interest were required by 15 September. There is a total of £25 million per annum available for 2009/10 and 2010/11. The details of the prospective allocation will be provided to interested authorities by 30 September and will be reported at the meeting. Confirmation of participation is required by 15 October 2008.
- 2.4 The third pot of money is of £10 million capital to be spent in 2008/9 to modernise swimming pools. This will be divided between those authorities who sign up for both free swimming schemes.
- 2.5 The final pot is of £25 million per annum in 2009/10 and 2010/11 to modernise pools and support more ambitious plans for free swimming. Authorities which sign up to pots 1 and 2 can bid for this. Criteria for allocation have not been published but this will be in the hands of Sport England.
- 2.6 The Council itself successfully funded free swimming for those under 18 during 2006/7 and 2007/8. The scheme was popular and successful and reached the full range of young people from across the City.

3 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The response attached as the appendix to this report has been sent to government. Since the funding available for the over 60 swimming is likely to cover the cost to the Council this has been accepted.
- 3.2 What is more problematic is how best to respond in October regarding the swimming for the 16 and unders. Although we do not at the time of writing know the amount available to us in government subsidy this will almost certainly be insufficient to cover the cost of free swimming. Given the financial climate this may not be affordable. It

is in any case difficult to make commitments at this stage when budget priorities for the coming two years have not been agreed.

- 3.3 Both the County Council and the Devon Primary Care Trust have been approached for funding contributions since the provision of free swimming would contribute to some of their key objectives. The Government anticipates that such partnership funding will be available to us.
- 3.4 Clearly the Council is in need of capital funding towards swimming provision in the City and even the modest amounts available could be usefully spent. Without knowledge of the number of councils eligible for this money and of the allocation criteria to be used for most of it, it is difficult to assess whether access to this pot is worth the potentially large revenue cost of subsidising 16 and under swimming.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If the Council confirms participation in the scheme for free swimming for the 16 and unders by the due date we will almost certainly be committed to significant but unknown revenue spending over the next two financial years.

5 RECOMMENDED

- 1) Executive decides whether or not the Council should participate in the scheme to offer free swimming to those aged 16 and under during the next two financial years.

DIRECTOR COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT

S:PA/LP/ Committee/908EXEC2
16.9.08

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report: