

Your ref – CMS 99869/MK

Dear Colleague

FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME

I am writing in response to your letter dated 29th July 2008 inviting expressions of interest in participating in the proposed free swimming programmes.

We would like to participate in the free swimming offer for those aged 60 and over who are resident in the City Council area. This is subject to the government payment being sufficient to cover the costs. Initial indications are that it is likely to do so.

Exeter City Council has had a disappointing budget settlement and is having to make some tough decisions about service reductions over the next three years. We did offer free swimming to those under 18 for two years but sadly can no longer fund this. While I am authorised to express an interest in this aspect of your programme, and indeed a great desire to be able to offer this service again to our young people, we will need assurances that our costs will be covered by the government grant. The contractors who run our pools are currently firming up costs but these are likely to be in the order of £200,000 per annum. I have written to local partners including the PCT and the County Council requesting contributions from them towards this scheme as it will contribute to shared agendas. I look forward to receiving details of our prospective allocation on 30th September.

We are currently in great difficulty when it comes to pool provision. Our main pool is 70 years old and in urgent need of major refurbishment if it is to continue in operation. Councillors have a very strong and unanimous desire to build a new pool fit for the twenty-first century. This is strongly supported by our wide variety of swimming and water sports clubs and by Liam Tancock, a local member of Team GB who swam for Britain in Beijing. A site has been identified for a new pool, preparatory work done and an options appraisal carried out. Without external funding however it is difficult to see how the Council can provide this within the prudential borrowing code. It is therefore disappointing that you propose limiting access to the capital pot to those councils who participate in free swimming for both groups. We may find swimmers in the City doubly penalised with the council neither funded to provide free swimming for young people in the existing ageing facility nor to replace it.

We would welcome any advice or help you can give us with potential capital funding sources for our pool project and hope that you will be able to fund free swimming for young people in Exeter.

If you think a meeting would be helpful to brief you further on these issues do let me know.

YS

HB
DCE
CC Ben Bradshaw MP