

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. **23**

meeting date: 7 SEPTEMBER 2010
 title: FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME – RIBBLESDALE POOL
 submitted by JOHN C HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMERCIAL SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Committee about the impact that free swimming has had upon attendances and operation of Ribblesdale Pool.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
- Council Ambitions - The contents of this report contribute to the Council's ambitions for making peoples lives safer and healthier.
 - Community Objectives - Access for all, community cohesion, community safety and improving the health and well-being of local people.
 - Corporate Priorities - Ensuring services are accessible to all.
 - Other Considerations – None

2 BACKGROUND

Committee approved the availability of free swimming to those aged 16 and under and 60 and over age groups; for the duration of the scheme which commenced in April 2009. The Government announced that local authorities would no longer receive support funding to deliver free swimming after 31st July 2010.

3 CURRENT SITUATIONS AND ISSUES

- 3.1 Those benefitting from free swimming at Ribblesdale Pool over the 16 month period, were advised as soon as the Government informed us that grant funding would conclude in supporting delivery of the programme, and they are now required to pay the admission fees as were approved for this financial year.
- 3.2 A comparison of junior and senior citizen swimming admissions pre free swimming, during its availability; reveals the following:

Before			
1 April 2007-			
31 July 2008	Juniors (aged 16 years and under)		25,625
	Senior Citizens (aged 60 years and over)		6,150
		TOTAL	35,775
 During			
1 April 2009–			
31 July 2010	Juniors		42,280
	Senior Citizens		17,327
		TOTAL	59,607

This represents an increase in admissions across the two target groups of 67% on the situation before free swimming. Whilst the number of senior citizen visits has almost trebled, junior swims have increased less markedly by 43%.

- 3.3 From an examination of the admissions since they have returned to full paying this month; (August 2010) with the same periods in 2009 and 2008, it would appear that the introduction of admission prices has affected the number of swims at the pool. Junior attendances have fallen by 25% from last year and 23% compared with the same period in 2008 before free swimming. Senior attendances have fallen by 34% compared with last year, but still remain higher (6%) compared with the same period prior to free swimming being introduced in 2008.

The national situation would appear to be consistent with our experience in that more free swims have been undertaken by people aged 16 and under than by those 60 and over despite the population sizes within each age category being similar. The number of free swims reported from local authority monitoring have been 6.99 million (60 and over), compared with 11.09 million (16 and under). However, it should be noted that the increase in the number of senior citizen swims has been considerably greater than the increase in junior swims at Ribblesdale Pool over the duration of the free swimming programme.

- 3.4 The free swimming programme enabled the delivery of free swimming instruction for senior citizens/adults and disabled persons and the following courses were provided:

September 2009 (12 weeks) - 16 adult improvers and beginners
January 2009 (12 weeks) - 8 senior citizens and 7 disabled persons
April 2010 (8 weeks) - 8 senior citizens and 6 disabled persons.

These courses were arranged during weekday day time hours when the pool was not being utilised for other purposes. At the conclusion of free lessons the attendees were required to pay for lessons at the normal rate if they wished to continue.

- 3.5 An increase of 14,000 admissions over the 16 month period inevitably has had an impact upon the day to day operations:

Programming

In order to maintain the bather loads at a level which was conducive to adults being able to undertake length swimming, it was necessary to programme adult-only swims during some early evenings.

Staffing

The increased bather loads at peak times have necessitated additional casual lifeguard cover on certain occasions to ensure that lifeguard to swimmer ratios were maintained within established health and safety standards.

Operational Maintenance

This is difficult to quantify but the increased admissions have placed greater strain on the support facilities (changing rooms, lockers, cubicles, showers, hair dryers and general wear and tear on the building). The need for maintaining water quality levels given increased bather loads will have

increased the use of chemicals and the amount of water used in back washing and diluting the pool.

3.6 However, overall there has been very little impact upon areas of expenditure over the period that increased visits have been accommodated and this would indicate that the facility has the capacity to cope with increasing attendances if this was to occur in the future for whatever reason. However, it should be emphasised that sensitive programming has been crucial to ensuring that all users groups continue to have a satisfactory swimming experience. It is also worth noting that a capital grant of £17,516 received for being part of the scheme has enabled the Small Pool to benefit from improvements to filtration and therefore is now better placed in maintaining water quality during high bathing loads.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – None at this point, though it remains to be seen if attendances return to similar levels to that prior to the free swimming programme and further monitoring will be necessary to identify the impact on future budgets.

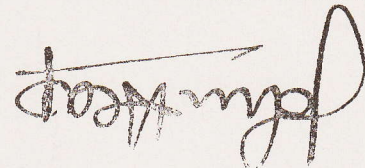
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None

- Political – None

- Reputation – None

5. RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

Notes the contents of this report.



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