

Report to Cabinet

23rd March 2022

Subject:	Extension of Free Swimming Programme 2022/23
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Culture & Tourism, Cllr Danny Millard
Director:	Director for Borough Economy, Alice Davey
Key Decision:	Yes Spend of more than £250,000 and affecting more than two wards.
Contact Officer:	Business Manager for Sport & Leisure, Gemma Ryan gemma_ryan@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That approval is given to the Service Manager – Tourism, Culture & Leisure to enter into an agreement with Sandwell Leisure Trust and Places Leisure to offer free swimming to: -

- a) Children and young people aged 18 years and under (exclusively Sandwell residents only) during public swimming sessions, for seven days per week, throughout school holidays only;
- b) Adults aged 60 years and over (exclusively Sandwell residents only) during public swimming sessions, for seven days per week before 1pm all year round; and
- c) Allocate a proportion of free swimming funding to primary care settings to be distributed through a social prescribing pathway for adults

for the financial year 2022/23.



- 1.2 That approval is given to the Service Manager – Tourism, Culture & Leisure to enter into an agreement with Sandwell Leisure Trust and Places Leisure to offer free swimming lessons to: -
- (a) Children and young people aged 16 years and under (exclusively Sandwell residents only) via a voucher scheme distributed through schools (identified as in receipt of benefits/low income and unable to afford lessons plus poor swimming ability in school swimming lessons); and
 - (b) primary care settings (to be distributed through a social prescribing pathway)
- for the financial year 2022/23.
- 1.3 That the Director for Finance be authorised to allocate a revenue budget of £275,000 for the free swimming offer and £150,000 for the free swimming lessons offer. This would total £425,000 for the financial year 2022/23.
- 1.4 That any necessary exemptions be made to the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in recommendation 1 (above) to proceed.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

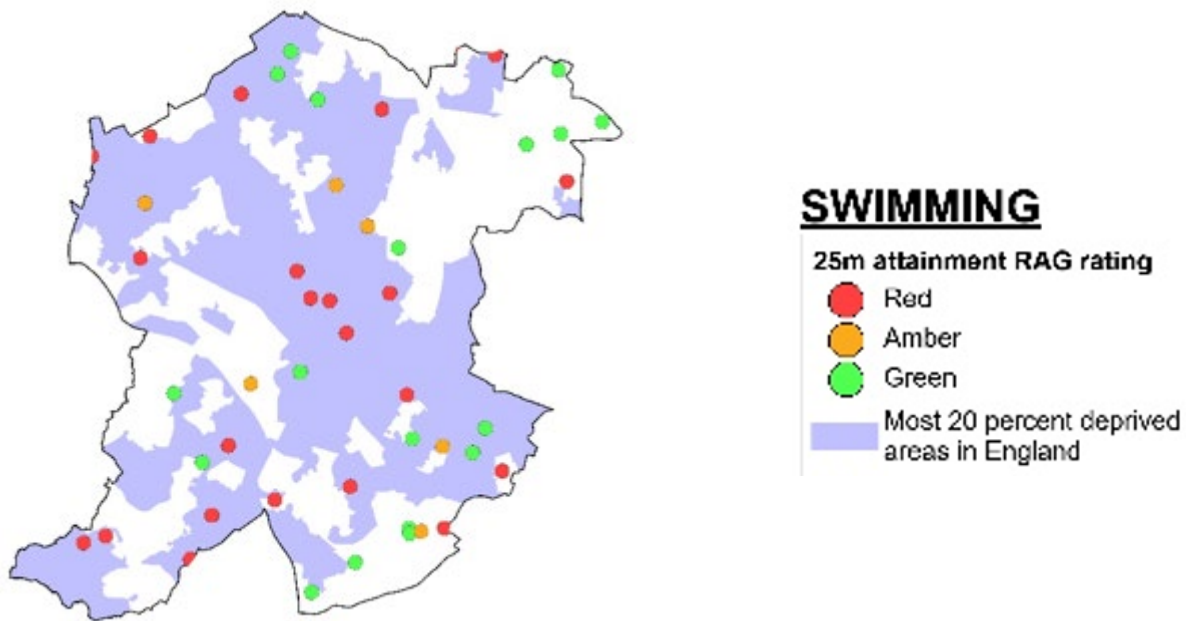
- 2.1 Participating in 30 minutes of physical activity or sport per week provides residents with significant health benefits. Being physically active reduces the likelihood of having a stroke, reduces blood pressure, reduces the likelihood of suffering from a blood clot, improves cholesterol levels, and promotes positive mental health and well-being.
- 2.2 Both leisure providers (SLT and Places Leisure) have reported a positive correlation between increased usage of young people and older people at the same time, i.e. young people are often accompanied by parents, grandparents or older carers. Suggesting that free swimming for young people encourages family visits and family interaction.
- 2.3 Increasing the age range to 18 years and under (previously 16 years and under) will widen the reach and support those young people staying on at school until 18 or moving on to further education.



2.4 Sandwell has seen a decrease in the number of children able to swim 25 metres in Year 6, falling to 54% (2021) from 57% (2020). This figure is lower than the Black Country average for 2021. The map below highlights which schools in Sandwell report lower than average year 6 swimming proficiency levels. The map seems to show that there is a larger concentration of schools reporting lower proficiency levels in West Bromwich.



Schools in Sandwell

- 25m Proficiency



(Primary School Swimming in the Black Country, Active Black Country 2021)

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p><i>The free swimming programme provides an opportunity for young people under 18 in Sandwell to swim for free during school holidays, promoting and supporting improvements in physical and mental health.</i></p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p><i>The free swimming programme provides an opportunity for residents over 60 and young people under 18 to become</i></p>



active and maintain an active lifestyle. This promotes and supports improvements in physical and mental health for local people.

4 Context and Key Issues

Background

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the continuation and expansion of the free swimming programme in Sandwell for the financial year 2022/23. The initial scheme was approved by the Cabinet on 12th June 2013 (see Minute No. 35/13), again at the meeting of Cabinet of 4th March 2015 (Minute No. 51/15), for the financial year 2015/16, again for financial year 2016/17 at the meeting of Cabinet of 22nd March 2017 (Minute No. 64/17), and further for financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 at the meeting of Cabinet of 21st March 2018 (Minute No. 47/18). The most recent approval was via a Delegated Decision Report on 8th April 2021.
- 4.2 The free swimming in Sandwell programme allows adults, who are Sandwell residents, aged 60 and over to swim without charge during public swimming sessions, for seven days per week before 1pm, all year round.
- 4.3 The current programme also allows for children and young people, who are Sandwell residents, aged 16 years and under to swim without charge during public swimming sessions, for seven days per week, throughout school holiday periods only. We are now proposing to extend the age to include free swimming for all under 18's.
- 4.4 The programme has been available to Sandwell residents at the following leisure facilities since 2013:
- Haden Hill Leisure Centre
 - Langley Swimming Centre
 - Smethwick Swimming Centre
 - Tipton Leisure Centre
 - Wednesbury Leisure Centre (since November 2015)
 - West Bromwich Leisure Centre (since June 2014)
- 4.5 Since the initiative was launched in June 2013, 9,624 adults and 44,579 children and young people who meet the criteria have become a member



of the scheme. Since April 2015, following four extensions of the scheme by Cabinet, until the end of December 2021, there has been 214,487 swims by residents aged 16 and under (136,105 at Sandwell Leisure Trust's five sites and 78,382 at Places Leisure's one site) and 332,100 swims by residents aged 60 and over (203,863 at Sandwell Leisure Trust's five sites and 128,237 at Places Leisure's one site).

- 4.6 In addition to the free swimming offer, Public Health have identified that a further investment in swimming would be welcomed by Sandwell's elected members, directors and senior leadership team and of course welcomed by the local community and in line with the 2022 Commonwealth Games and new Sandwell Aquatics Centre.
- 4.7 The plan for this further investment would be to award Sandwell's leisure providers to offer/deliver a free-swimming lessons programme through facilities with swimming pools and to an open age range. The initial idea would be to develop a voucher scheme for the free lessons that would be mostly distributed through school settings (Primary and Secondary). It is felt that schools would be best placed to identify children, young people and families that were at most need, on benefits/low income and unable to afford lessons and also able to identify poor swimming ability through school swimming lessons.
- 4.8 Schools are required to ensure that as a minimum, by the time children are ready to leave Key Stage 2, every child is able to: swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres, use a range of strokes effectively and perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations. Sandwell schools have reported challenges in supporting children to swim proficiently and need more support.
- 4.9 Swimming is one of the most popular traditional sports in the UK and there is also a real opportunity with the 2022 Commonwealth Games swimming taking place at the new Sandwell Aquatics Centre. The new Aquatics Centre (the only new build facility developed for the games) in Sandwell is a significant asset and it's essential we take advantage of heightened interest as a result.

Public Health

- 4.8 This programme utilises funding from the Public Health Grant to facilitate a more active life in our youngest and older residents. As such, it is an important element of the local '#MoveMoreSandwell' partnership work,



which is led by the Council and delivered in collaboration with several local partner agencies.

- 4.9 Public Health are supportive of an extension to the programme, not only because of the positive health outcomes for residents as highlighted in the consultation carried out during 2019, but to ensure that there is not a rise in inactivity of residents in the next national annual Active Lives Survey.
- 4.10 The majority of the funding for the programme has been provided by Public Health since its launch in 2013.

Health & Wellbeing Benefits

- 4.11 Both leisure providers in Sandwell have reported a positive correlation between increased usage of young people and older people at the same time, i.e. young people are often accompanied by parents, grandparents or older carers. Suggesting that free swimming for young people encourages family visits and family interaction.
- 4.12 Although there has been a significant positive impact on the number of residents participating in 30 minutes of physical activity or sport, levels of inactivity are still high in the borough. Sport England's Active Lives Survey (ALS) October 2021 highlights that 42.1% of Sandwell residents are classed as inactive.
- 4.13 Participating in 30 minutes of physical activity or sport per week provides residents with significant health benefits. Being physically active reduces the likelihood of having a stroke, reduces blood pressure, reduces the likelihood of suffering from a blood clot, improves cholesterol levels, and promotes mental health & well-being.
- 4.14 Aside from the established health benefits of being more active and the importance of developing a positive relationship with activity from a young age, the ability to swim is a key life skill. Also, children who can swim confidently and competently will be better able to take advantage of the free swimming offer.

Budget

- 4.15 In order to calculate the cost for free swimming for the 2022/23 financial year, figures have been based on actual swims and costs during the 2018/19 financial year as this was the last year of full opening. This method and rationale accounts for the leisure sector returning to normal operation



by providing usual, maximum expected costs of the programme to March 2023.

- 4.16 It is therefore anticipated that the cost of reinstating the free swimming programme for the remainder of the financial year will be a maximum of £275,000. This incorporates an additional £5,943 towards the cost of free swims for 18 years and under. There will also be an additional £150,000 made available for the free swimming lesson offer. This would total £425,000 for the financial year 2022/23.

Anticipated Figures for Free Swimming for Financial Year 2022/23					
	U16 £2.65 per swim	Cost	60+ £2.35 per swim	Cost	Total
SLT	30,668	£81,271	42,771	£100,512	£181,783
	U16 £2.80 per swim		60+ £2.30 per swim		
Places Leisure	12,042	£33,718	23,285	£53,556	£87,274
Additional funding for U18					£5,943
Total					£275,000

Additional Funding for Free Swimming Lessons for Financial Year 2022/23			
3 x £25.75/month + £10 Joining Fee (covers badges/certificates)	= £87.25	x 1700 pupils	£148,325
Marketing			£1,675
Total			£150,000

Consultation

- 4.17 An evaluation of the programme was carried out during 2019 and a Summary Report was developed in consultation with SLT and Places Leisure in January 2020. As part of this evaluation, participants of the scheme were consulted with via an on-line survey which demonstrated that the programme is valued. Both operators feel that the programme is of value to their customers.
- 4.18 The Director for Borough Economy, Director of Public Health, Cabinet member for Adults, Social Care & Health and Cabinet Member for Culture



& Tourism and have been consulted on the reinstatement of this programme.

4.19 In October 2021 consultation with the Local Swimming Action Groups were held, consisting of a range of local stakeholders including local authority representatives, schools and Swim England. This has shown there is a clear demand from schools to increase swimming opportunities either through their core offer or through additional lessons. The challenge facing schools is the available pool space, preventing them from increasing the amount of pool time or number pupils they can take swimming. This is particularly important for those schools where school swimming is likely to be the only opportunity for their pupils to learn to swim.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The free swimming programme could be dis-continued. However, if the Council does not continue the programme this would have an adverse impact on the opportunities available to Sandwell residents. It would also affect the opportunity for some of our most vulnerable residents to participate in some form of physical activity.
- 5.2 The resources could be invested into other sport and physical activity programmes. However, swimming has the ability to engage and provide health benefits on a wider scale than many other activities, as demonstrated by the consultation exercise. It engages a wide range of ages and abilities and is an essential life skill.



6 Implications

Resources:	The programme will require up to a maximum of £425,000 for the period 1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023. The programme has been budgeted for within Public Health and agreed by the Director of Public Health.
Legal and Governance:	Sandwell Leisure Trust and Places Leisure are contracted by Sandwell Council to operate leisure facilities in Sandwell. For the free swimming programme to be delivered this can only be achieved through the use of these contractors. Therefore, an exemption from the Council's Contract Procurement Rules is required to deliver this scheme.
Risk:	N/A
Equality:	An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been completed and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.
Health and Wellbeing:	Participating in physical activity has significant health benefits, including reducing risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, many cancers, mental health and general health and well-being.
Social Value:	A comprehensive and well managed swimming provision can achieve vital social value outcomes, including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved health • Improved well-being • Increased educational attainment • Reduction in crime

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

