

# 23 4

**Culture, Tourism and Sport**

**Item 4**

15 September 2009

---

## **Free Swimming**

### **Summary**

This paper updates members on recent developments in the free swimming scheme.

### **Recommendations**

That members note the report and confirm the LGA lobbying messages in **paragraph 5**.

### **Action**

Subject to any comments from members' officers to take forward appropriate actions.

Contact Officer: Steve Skelton  
Phone No: 020 7664 3074  
Email: [steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk)

## Free Swimming

### Background

1. The Free Swimming Programme (FSP) has been live from April 2009. 252 councils have opted to deliver one or both of the free swimming schemes: one for young people aged 16-and-under and one for the over-60s.
2. The FSP is a voluntary scheme jointly funded by five government departments, led by DCMS, and by local funding from council tax, which accounts for around a quarter of the costs of delivery. The total cost of the FSP is £140m, including £60m of capital funding available to participating authorities for improvements to public and school swimming pools.
3. The remaining funding amounts to £40m of revenue grant each year for 2009-10 and 2010-11. Of this, £15m per year is available to support free swimming for 16s-and-under and £25m per year for the over-60s. The LGA estimates that council tax payers are therefore contributing around £10m a year to the successful delivery of this scheme.

### Progress

4. Initial through-put data from the first quarter (April 2009 – June 2009) shows that there have been 4.4 million free swimming sessions. At present, however, we do not know how many individual swimmers this relates to, whether they previously went swimming but paid to do so, or indeed whether there has been an overall increase or decrease in the number and frequency of people swimming in England.
5. Initial results from an LGA survey indicate that councils are contributing, on average, 24% of the costs of the Free Swimming scheme. We believe this substantial contribution should be more explicitly acknowledged by government. It will also need to be factored into the evaluation of the scheme, the funding for which is in place only until 2011. The LGA is calling for a clear commitment from government to explain how the scheme will be funded beyond 2011, or whether public spending constraints will require it to be discontinued.
6. The LGA is represented on the project management architecture of the FSP and has used its role to push for the interests of councils to be recognised, for the burden of delivering the scheme to be as light as possible, and for all available funds to be directed to the local level in order to relieve the burden on council tax payers.

7. County Swimming Co-ordinators, employed by the Amateur Swimming Association, are working through County Sport and Physical Activity Partnerships to (CSPAPs) to help add value to the scheme where it operates. The LGA, in partnership with CLOA, was invited to provide an introduction to the local government context as part of the co-ordinators' induction training. These sessions were used to press home messages about:
  - the need for their work to add value to existing delivery of swimming (free or otherwise);
  - recognition of the contribution that councils make to the sport and physical activity infrastructure in England; and,
  - recognition of the political nature of local authorities, and the need for them to reflect local priorities.

## **Financial Implications**

8. None arising from this report.

## **Implications for Wales**

9. The FSP applies only in England. The Welsh free swimming scheme is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Contact Officer: Steve Skelton  
Phone No: 020 7664 3074  
Email: [steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk)