

CULTURE, LEISURE & TOURISM PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD

20th July 2010

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Hilary Thompson (Culture, Leisure & Tourism Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Pat Usher, Sport and Recreation Manager
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

5. National Free Swimming Initiative – Cessation of Government Funding *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the cessation of Government funding in support of the national free swimming initiative April 2009 to March 2011 effective 31st July 2010.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Council had previously been invited to take part in the national free swimming initiative for over 60s and under 16s for a 2 year period from April 2009. Revenue funding of £26,848 per annum for the over 60s programme and £58,131 per annum for the under 16s programme was received, along with £20,000 PCT partnership funding. Local Authorities were also given the opportunity to bid for capital funding to make improvements to swimming provision. Following a successful application facilities at Mill House Leisure Centre were refurbished.

On 17th June the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport announced that this funding would cease from 31st July 2010. A grant to cover 1st April – 31st July 2010 would be paid to local authorities. Without this funding the Council would need to find £55,897 to fund the programme. Given the current financial difficulties faced by the Council and the impossible task of finding alternative funding sources within the timeframe officers had concluded that there was no option other than to cease the programme. Details of the proposed new swimming charges were given within the report. It was noted that under normal circumstances these would have been brought to Portfolio for approval before the start of the

new financial year however given the circumstances this had not been possible in this case. Previously in order to access the free swimming participants had to be in possession of an Active Card at a cost of £2. Officers were keen to continue use of the Active Card at £2 in order to assess the effect of the cessation of the free swimming scheme on the use of the service, particularly given that the proposed new charges were lower than in previous years. The Portfolio Holder clarified that the £2 charge would apply to all users, including the over 60s. This was confirmed.

The Portfolio Holder expressed her disappointment at the cut in funding but felt that given the current financial situation faced by the Council there was no option other than to cease the free swimming programme particularly as the lateness of the announcement had left no opportunity for officers to seek alternative sources of funding. She hoped that during the 15 months the programme had been running large numbers of people had been persuaded to try the sport and that this use would continue. She also felt that the proposed new prices were fair and was particularly pleased to see the reduced charges for the groups previously covered by the free swimming initiative.

Decision

1. That the announcement in relation to the removal of the Government's grant to support the Free Swimming Initiative for over 60s and under 16s effective 31st July 2010 be noted
2. That the grant awarded for the period 1st April – 31st July 2010 amounting to £9,118 for the over 60s and £19,964 for the under 16s provision leaving a financial shortfall of £55,897 for 2010/11 be noted
3. That the cessation of the Free Swimming Programme for over 60s and under 16s be approved effective 31st July 2010
4. That the consequent swim charges as detailed in Section 5 be approved effective 1st August 2010
5. That the 'freezing' of the Active Card charge for the remainder of the financial year be approved to allow for an adequate assessment of take-up to be monitored by Officers

The meeting concluded at 10:10 am

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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