

TITLE OF REPORT: Case Study - Public Swimming and Swimming Clubs
REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities & Environment

Summary

The purpose of this is to consider the wider issues of public access to swimming, including its value in public health terms and funding.

Background

- 1.0 On 2 June 2015 Cabinet agreed (minute C5) to the arranging of a Policy Advisory Group, open to all councillors, to consider the wider issue of public access to swimming. This will include its value in public health terms and its funding, and whether this should form the basis of a review/case study to be undertaken by the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with a report back to Cabinet.
- 1.1 On 23 October a Policy Advisory Group considered a report and recommended that the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee review this case study, with a report back to Cabinet (minutes of the Advisory Group attached at Appendix 1).

Issues the OSC might want to consider:

National Picture

- 2.0 Councils are the biggest public spenders on community sport, spending some £925 million per year (excluding capital spend) on the leisure centres, swimming pools and open spaces, where the majority of this country's nine million grass roots enthusiasts play sport. However this spend has gone down by £400m since 2009.
- 2.1 According to Sport England's Active People Survey, between October 2013 and October 2014, 125,100 fewer people nationally did some kind of sport once a week for 30 minutes, bringing the overall number down from 15.7 million to 15.6 million. But swimming, the country's most popular sport with over 2.6 million people taking part weekly, has seen a much bigger drop of 245,000 nationally in the same period.
- 2.2 The Active People Survey 9 Q2 results published by Sport England, June 2015, indicate that participation rates in swimming (the country's most popular sport) are continuing to decline with 144,200 fewer people taking to the pool in the last six months and 390,700 in the last year. The statistics, which covers the six month period from October 2014 to March 2015, show 15.5 million people did some kind of sport once a week, every week – 222,000 fewer than

six months ago. This reflects the importance of swimming to national physical activity participation rates.

Local Picture

- 3.0 In Gateshead, swimming is the top participatory sport for those aged 14yrs plus with over 21,000 (13% - higher percentage than both national and regional data) people taking part at least once per week (Sport England's Active People Survey 8).
- 3.1 According to the Active People Survey, approximately 13,000 more Gateshead residents (aged 16years plus) wish to do more swimming activity as part of their lifestyle. Between April 2014 and March 2015, over 335,000 swimming attendances across all of the Council's leisure facilities were recorded. With these figures in mind, swimming is a major contributor to physical activity levels in Gateshead, and to the positive health and wellbeing of residents.
- 3.2 Swimming is also recognised as a vital life skill as well as a form of sport and physical activity and over 2000 primary school children visit swimming pools each week to learn to swim, resulting in over 85,000 visits per year. Approximately 50% achieve the current Key Stage 2 target of swimming 25 metres unaided, which is below the 2015 national average (55%) reported by the ASA.

Learn to Swim Programme

- 4.0 The Council delivers a learn to swim programme following the Amateur Swimming Association's (ASA) Learn to Swim Framework. The framework consists of the following;
- a) Foundation Framework – Aimed at babies/toddlers and parents
 - b) Learn to Swim Pathway model (Stage 1-7) – the all-inclusive programme which takes the non-swimmer from his or her first splash to developing confidence and competence in the water. Individuals are able to complete a number of tasks such as swim 100 metres, utilising varying techniques.
 - c) Aqua skills framework – The ASA Aquatic Skills Framework (Stages 8-10) is the section of the learn to swim pathway that follows on from Stages 1-7. This includes specialist elements such as Competitive Swimming, Diving, Water Polo, Rookie Lifesaving, Snorkelling and Synchronised Swimming.
 - d) Adult Swimming framework – The adult framework is an adapted version of stages 1-7 referenced above.

- 4.1 The Council currently provides access to the Foundation stage and Stages 1-7 of the ASA's Learn to Swim pathway, with 2600 children attending each week resulting in over 130,000 attendances annually. An adult learn to swim programme was recently trialled in the summer which proved successful and is likely to be further developed. Nationally, adult lesson numbers are approximately 20% of junior programme numbers, giving Gateshead the potential to have approximately 500+ adults in a learn to swim programme.
- 4.2 Individuals wishing to access Stages 8-10 (Aquatic Skills) are signposted to relevant swimming clubs.
- 4.3 Swimming Clubs, however also deliver Stages 1-7 in Gateshead, which in comparison, is not something which is replicated across most Tyne & Wear local authorities. Many local authorities and swimming pool providers are moving towards a model in which the pool provider delivers swimming lessons, to allow clubs to focus purely on 'aquatic skills' from Stage 8 onwards.

Swimming Clubs in Gateshead

- 5.0 There are currently seven swimming clubs in Gateshead, Gateshead & Whickham ASC, Blaydon ASC, Birtley, Tyneside Sub Aqua, Gateshead Synchronised Swimming Club and Ryton Triathlon Club, Gateshead Kestrels Swimming Club, with a combined membership of 652 people (501 in 2011).
- 5.1 These clubs are currently supported by the Council through the Gateshead Aquatics Development Group which has representation from clubs, the amateur swimming association and Council Officers.
- 5.2 On the 2nd June Cabinet approved (minute number C5) the increase in fees and charges for swimming clubs. This could have a longer term impact of the viability of such clubs, and the Council are currently working with the clubs to consider a longer term sustainable model.

Public Health and Obesity

- 6.0 In Gateshead, we have particularly high rates of both adults and children that are overweight and obese. Many people have a poor diet with low levels of physical activity and high alcohol consumption.
- 6.1 The evidence base for obesity doesn't lend itself to a specific delivery system but instead identifies a range of factors that contribute to obesity at a population level. Consequently obesity cannot be effectively tackled by one discipline or approach and as such local authorities are ideally placed to develop coordinated action to tackle obesity across its various departments, services and partner organisations. Physical activity is one factor that can contribute to reducing obesity levels.

Swimming and Health

- 7.0 Regular physical activity reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, dementia, mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions. It is recommended that adults should do at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) of moderate intensity activity in bouts of 10 minutes or more every week. Children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day. (UK Physical Activity Guidelines, Dept for Health, 2011)
- 7.1 The Amateur Swimming Associations strategy 'Swimming – Taking the plunge for a fitter lifestyle, 2014' clearly identifies the role of swimming in society and achieving public health outcomes, such as increasing physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight. The strategy also highlights the benefits of aquatic activities to those with mobility problems and the NHS Choices, website recommends swimming as an ideal activity for post-natal women.
- 7.2 A report by Intelligent Health 'Physical Activity & Long Term Conditions A guide for GP's' 2012, specifically recommends swimming as a physical activity to support those with Cancer, Osteoarthritis, lower back pain, and cardiovascular disease.
- 7.3 The ASA, also report that there are significant benefits to swimming for babies as it improves coordination and balance, by enhancing muscle development, and ultimately develops water confidence.
- 7.4 This report provides an overview of the current position with regards to swimming and clubs, from a national and local perspective which will help members consider the role of swimming.

Future challenges the OSC may wish to consider

- 8.0 The OSC may wish to take into account the following challenges and issues:**
- Swimming is on the decline on a national and local basis, however there is a demand for swimming in Gateshead, with at least 13,000 more adults wishing to participate in Gateshead.
 - The health benefits of physical activity and swimming are significant and well documented within the report.

Future Implications

9.0 The following implications should be considered by the OSC:

- The role of swimming clubs in delivering 'learn to swim' programmes alongside Council provision and the potential of clubs focusing purely on coaching.

Recommendations

10.0 The views of the OSC are sought on:-

- The role of the local authority and clubs in delivering learn to swim programmes and
- The wider issue of public access to swimming, including its value in public health terms and its funding.