

Policy Advisory Group – 23 October 2015

Report to Cabinet

Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of the Advisory Group was to consider the wider issue of public access to swimming, including its value in public health terms and its funding.

The Advisory Group were informed that the Council has invested significantly in the refurbishment of its leisure stock however the Council's current budget proposals are to reduce the leisure budget further. The Council are on track to achieve the savings through various means that include:

- Transfer of responsibility to community groups – Dunston Activity Centre and Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre
- Operational changes in some centres
- Reduced management
- Increase in charges

The Group were informed that as part of the Leisure review being undertaken work will take place to look at business models and how to maximise income.

Summary of Advice

- The Group noted that there has been a significant decline in swimming since 2012 within Gateshead, but that this follows a national picture. The Group were informed that currently there are 21,000 adults participating locally in swimming on a weekly basis but that 13,000 more wished to take part (results taken from Sport England's Active People Survey)
- The Group considered that there were discrepancies in the results of the sports participation survey, in particular the number of people who indicated their desire to participate in swimming and the numbers of those actually participating.
- It was recommended that further analysis of this information be undertaken. It was requested that information be captured, where possible, to identify the reasons of the issues that prevent people from swimming, and also link this to national research.
- The Group queried the school uptake of swimming and were informed that there is a target that all key stage 2 children are able to swim 25metres. The Group noted that all Schools in Gateshead send children to swimming lessons in Gateshead pools, but also that the Council is working with the Amateur Swimming Association to target all schools to sign up to a new School Swimming Charter.
- The Group were informed that the Council has increased charges for swimming clubs but that the Council does still subsidise their use. Work is taking place with six swimming clubs to identify a sustainable business model for the future. The Group referred to the swimming clubs and commented that the subsidy they receive

may be benefitting children who may not live within the borough. The Group suggested that the Swimming Clubs use of the swimming pools be subsidised by the clubs themselves and possibly the families of the members of the clubs. It was however noted that through sustainable delivery models, the Council may reduce the subsidy currently provided to swimming clubs.

- The importance of local schools having greater access to swimming pools was highlighted as the Group consider there is a need for all children to gain confidence within the water.
- The Group supported the possibility of additional swimming lessons for school children and maximising the use of the pools.
- The Group acknowledged that currently there are not enough swimming teachers to be able to meet a proposed increase in lessons and requested that the possibility of apprenticeship placements in this area also be explored. The Group also noted that there are differences in the current salary of swimming instructors at the Council compared to private providers and swimming club instructors.
- The Group advised that there are varying accounts of activities/lessons which take place across each swimming pool, for example those that work with children with varying degrees of special needs, and it would be useful to have an understanding of what takes place at all swimming pools.
- The Group queried the number of users of the pools that live outside of the borough. It was noted that at present this information can only be captured if a user has a GO Membership. Similarly if a person is a casual swimmer there is no information available to show whether or not they live in or outside of the borough.
- The Group acknowledged that the free swimming initiative within Gateshead (2009-10) was very successful, in particular reaching over 3000 young people, but that as the scheme was withdrawn after a short period of time, there was little opportunity to be able to review its impact.
- Discussions took place with regard to maximising income through marketing. It was suggested that advertising methods be explored. One option could be to advertise on the back of bus tickets, offering a percentage reduction of a swim on production of the ticket at a swimming pool.
- Where centres have additional features such as the flow rider, used frequently for parties, the Group suggested that there may be scope to create a more tailored party experience and that this should be explored.
- It was also suggested that there could be greater advertising through the use of social media, in particular to reach young people.
- The Group queried if there would be scope to have 'one stop shop' facilities at swimming pools for residents to be able to access 'other council services.
- The Group highlighted the importance of the correct IT systems to be put in place so that relevant information can be captured.

- Overall, the Group recognise that that there is potential to do more in all of the swimming pools and recommended that access to swimming should form the basis of a review/case study to be undertaken by the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Chair: Councillor J Green

Members Present: Councillors M Brain, S Green, M Hood, J McElroy, J Simpson and L Twist

Officers Present: Lindsay Murray – Communities and Environment
Chris Strong – Communities and Environment
Karen Robson - Corporate Services and Governance