

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE		Subject: PROVISION OF FREE SWIM SWIMMING FACILITIES TO CHILDREN	
From: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES			
Date: 22 August 2001	Ref: MMcM/CW/MR		

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report evaluates the performance of the free swim scheme introduced by the Department of Community Services during the school summer holiday period.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 North Lanarkshire Council endorsed a decision to operate free swims for all children under the age of 16 years within all Sport and Recreation managed pools and those pools operating within the Time Capsule Monklands.
- 2.2 The scheme was in operation for the duration of the North Lanarkshire school holiday period from 30 June to 19 August 2001 inclusive.
- 2.3 The total sum of £160,000 was identified to be allocated to the Department of Community services to fund the costs of the scheme, if required.
- 2.4 It was considered that the scheme would assist in achieving greater levels of physical activity among the under 16 target age group and that the exercise habit be continued in the future to promote healthier lifestyles. Thus achieving improved levels of personal health and well being.

3. USER ANALYSIS

- 3.1 Junior usage over the six weeks period totalled over 230,058, which achieved an overall increase of over 159,937 from similar period last year, which represents an increase of 202%.
- 3.2 Adult usage over six week period totalled over 70,229 which achieved an increase of 6560 from similar period last year therefore representing an increase of 10.3%.
- 3.3 All swimming pools enjoyed increased junior admissions during the scheme with Aquatec and Time Capsule recording the highest increases of over 348% and 351% respectively. This increase is due predominately to their leisure orientation which attracted more family groups, repeat admissions and success of attracting users from wider catchment areas. This was despite the fact that the Time Capsule lost four operating days due to an incident. At the lower end Kilsyth Pool achieved increases of 72% which is probably reflective of its local community base.

- 3.4 Adult usage displayed an increase of 10.3%, however Wishaw, Tryst and John Smith pool showed negative returns which suggests that increased junior activity within pools caused some disruption to regular adult swimming activities.

4. FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

- 4.1 Income from junior admissions displayed a loss of over £119,323 compared to previous year, which represents a decrease of 97.79%. Whilst income from adult admissions achieved an increase of £15,069 from last year, despite negative usage returns for some pools already mentioned, which represents an increase of 15.37%. Therefore in view of the above a net income loss position of £104,254 has been incurred.
- 4.2 Catering units within facilities achieved an increase of £5889, however this figure only relates to the period between 29 June and 21 July and excludes vending services. Therefore this figure would be anticipated to increase to the end of the free swim offer.
- 4.3 Total miscellaneous revenue has increased by £27,884 from last year, which represents a percentage increase of 32%.
- 4.4 Additional staffing costs of £69,981 has been incurred during the scheme which has predominately been met by utilisation of relief staff. However overtime cover has also been essential to maintain desirable staffing levels which has incurred enhanced rates of pay of time and a half and double time.
- 4.5 Additional marketing expenditure of £8657 was incurred to ensure an effective promotional strategy was set in place to maximise public awareness of the scheme. This included local media press and radio advertising, large banner campaign posted externally on buildings and poster campaign to promote loyalty scheme to juniors and discount family swim offers to promote regular visits after the free swim scheme has ended.
- 4.6 Damage was sustained to facilities due to actions of vandalism mainly in regard to graffiti markings externally and internally, keys for lockers, broken changing room doors and hand drier and hair dryer convenience appliances. As a result estimated costs of £2000 are likely to be incurred to rectify matters under the control of the Department.
- 4.7 Total additional costs of £151,119 has been incurred by the Department in relation to the operation of the scheme based on the above information.

5. USER SURVEY

- 5.1 A user survey was conducted during the course of the scheme with a total of 1954 survey responses returned.
- 5.2 Before the scheme 33% indicated that they utilised the facility more than twice a week, whilst during the scheme 74% indicated that their participation levels reached twice or more a week. Figures therefore confirm an increase in the swimming activities of users during the scheme, which is borne out by the overall increase in user figures.
- 5.3 Similarly, before the scheme 18% of respondents indicated that they seldom or never used the facility prior to the scheme, whilst during the scheme all respondents indicated that they were swimming at least once a week which confirms that low frequency users, lapsed users and non users were actively encouraged to take up swimming on a more regular basis.

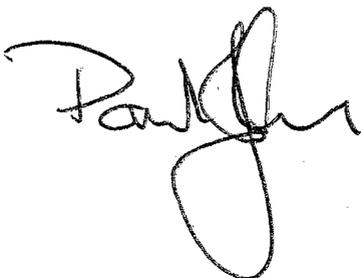
- 5.4 In the future over 73% indicated that they planned to continue swimming on a regular basis. Further evaluation of user trends will be required over the forthcoming months to validate these expressed intentions.
- 5.5 Most popular comments from respondents expressed praise for North Lanarkshire Council for offering the scheme and highlighted that standard of facilities and customer services offered were excellent. Main comments of concern highlighted that more time restrictions should be in place to accommodate adult swimming.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Substantial increases were achieved in junior usage during the scheme which therefore can be adjudged to have been relatively successful towards increasing levels of physical activity and building water confidence and skills within this target age group which was an identified key objective. However adult usage displayed decreases within certain facilities and revised provision should be considered in the future to assist their swimming activities, should the scheme be considered in the future.
- 6.2 Additional costs of £151,119 were incurred by the Department mainly in regard to loss of income and increased operational costs. However it was confirmed that revenue increases were achieved from miscellaneous income, catering and adult swim admission charges which off set total sum of additional costs. The budget allocation received to compensate the Department for additional costs will require to be apportioned on the basis of specific costs incurred to take account of the specific financial requirements of the Sport and Recreation D.S.O. and the Time Capsule.
- 6.3 Increased levels of swimming activity have been achieved during the scheme. However, to confirm if similar levels are continued after the end of the scheme when normal prices are resumed further user and income analysis should be collated. Such an analysis would demonstrate actual levels of sustainability achieved which will assist the planning process to decide if similar future schemes are to be introduced.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That in future similar schemes should be considered in regard to other school holiday periods throughout the year.
- 7.2 That the Committee notes the additional expenditure required and that funding will be contained within the Councils overall resources.
- 7.3 That a future report be compiled thereafter, to ascertain the sustainability of the scheme over a period of 2 months from the end of the scheme.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Pauline', written in a cursive style.