

Swimming: Focus on Change

Introduction

Following a recent review of swimming it is clear that we are unable make the much needed improvements to our primary swimming objectives without rethinking how we deliver swimming as a whole. Warrington Borough Councils swim priorities are well documented: (22 April 2003).

1. Learn to swim programmes (Swim Scheme Learn to Swim)
2. Public Swimming
3. School swimming
4. Swimming Clubs / Training Squads

This report details reasons for re-directing resources to those areas where they can have most impact. Our aim is to ensure that improved swim programmes exist based on swimming priorities that will help deliver improved opportunities for existing Learn to Swim Programmes and Public Swimming.

Background Information

The swim scheme Learn to Swim programme currently offers opportunities for 2,186 children to learn to swim within all of the Councils Leisure facilities.

Offering children the opportunity to build confidence in deep water as opposed to swimming in Teaching Pools enhances the progression from beginner to improver.

In addition we aim to direct resources towards ensuring that young children are actively participating in physical activity by encouraging swimming via public swim sessions, with an after school club / extended schools opportunities or swim lessons. This approach offers major benefits in relation to tackling the much publicised inactivity and obesity agendas.

This is not possible at present within the demanding financial climate as the Council supports the Elite Training Squads by offering 10 hours pool time during peak midweek periods. During those times the Main Pools are unavailable for use by the swim scheme or for public swimming. By nature of the pool layouts and the noise generated, they also impact on the ability to offer learn to swim sessions in teaching pools at some of the centres.

The existing financial arrangement means that Leisure Centres do not receive any payment from the training squads for hire / use of the swimming pools. The existing fees being paid by training squad members covers the cost of a swimming coach / assistant(s).

Select Leisure currently deliver the school swimming programme to 70 schools in Warrington and at present offer every Year 3 / 4 child in Warrington a minimum of 20 x 30-minute swimming lessons per year.

Our aim is to ensure that when leaving Junior School every child has achieved NVQ Level 2 and is able to swim a minimum of 25 metres. For the past two

years those children who have not attained the required standard have been supported by the 'top up' swim programme. (Additional swim lessons)

Funding for the two-year 'top up' programme offers additional swim lessons for pupils and a commitment is given by both the school and parent to ensuring that pupils work towards achieving NVQ Level 2. In the academic year 2005/06 a total of 647 pupils did not reach the required standard for NVQ Level 2 and were unable to swim 25 metres. The swim scheme anticipates a comparable number for the year 2006/07.

Funding for the top up swim sessions is no longer available and part of the time currently utilised by the training squads could be used to deliver additional discounted swim lessons via the swim scheme or as public swim time offering swimming to pupils at a discounted rate.

The existing swimming programmes within Leisure Centres require a change from the current provision of resources directed towards the Training Squads and utilising existing expertise to focus on the Learn to Swim programmes. In addition a reduction in the number of hours being offered to the Training Squads may offer additional opportunities for public swimming.

Each Swimming Club should have a clear mission statement for appropriate ages and stages of a child's development in relation to athlete / personal development. In order to make best use of available water space it is suggested that every club analyse the water space and usage with a view to consolidating sessions thus ensuring that the Council is still able to support the elite swimmers in Warrington.

It should be noted that only 2% of children exit the swim scheme programme and progress to competitive swimming.

Swimming Clubs and Training Squads will continue to receive support from Select Leisure by co-ordinating the ongoing Swim Liaison Committee chaired by the Head of Leisure Facilities. Additional advice on Recruitment and Selection, Health and Safety and the provision of early morning swim sessions at an agreed discounted rate will also be available.

Key Implications

The training squads are highly organised and it is likely that a decision to withdraw both coaching expertise and peak swim time will lead to negative publicity. In addition it will impact on the ability of the squads to effectively provide an elite swim programme designed to produce swimmers to the current high standards.

The withdrawal of the swimming coach will enable Select Leisure to direct resources towards developing swim teachers via extra training, improving the existing service level agreement for school swimming, developing the swim scheme learn to swim programme and working towards swim promotions for the next 3 years.

The extra pool time would enable Select Leisure to develop additional learn to swim sessions for adults and children, support the specific requirements of females from the ethnic communities and provide sessions specifically for those persons with disabilities. The focus on improved swim teacher training and developing specific sessions will assist in customer retention.

Recommendations

- The swimming programmes at all Leisure Centres are changed to offer a better balance and focus for Learn to Swim Programmes and Public Swimming.
- Select Leisure initiate a drive to increase swim lesson waiting lists, promoting swimming with the assistance of some of the young adults within the existing elite swimming programme will ensure children have role models and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. (Local nurseries, primary schools.)
- By January 2008 the existing swim coach position is changed to reflect Warrington Borough Council priorities.
- As detailed Select Leisure continue to support the Warriors Swimming Club and work towards changing existing midweek sessions and investigate the possibility of provision during other off peak periods.
- Continue further discussions with the Warriors Swimming Club with a view to the Club recruiting a swim coach and the setting up of a service level agreement to continue with elite swimming in Warrington.

In 2008, if resources allow, the free swim financial support takes into account the need to make provision for:

- Top up swim lessons for pupils not achieving the required standard. (Able to swim 25 metres)
- Providing swim lessons for those persons with disabilities.
- Sessions aimed specifically at those with individual requirements or those groups who are difficult to engage (Women from ethnic communities and young females)
- Providing adult swim lessons for those sections of our communities not currently participating in swimming. (Ethnic communities, Hard to Reach, local migrant workers relocating to Warrington.)

Swimming Coaches currently on fixed term contracts to be re-designated as swim teachers to develop the Learn to Swim Programme.

Appendix 1

*We are providing a 'break even' level of service provision.

*We need to take a business view on how to make best use of the existing Training Squad usage during early evening midweek sessions

Option:

Withdraw a percentage of the Training Squads existing early evening usage and develop sessions as recommended. Relocate Woolston and Great Sankey sessions to off Peak times and adopt a charge of £20.00 per hour. (Fordton to remain as is until learn to swim waiting lists are sufficient to change focus at Fordton).

Support the Training Squads early morning sessions at Fordton Leisure Centre and adopt a minimal charge of £10.00 per hour. (Normal Charge: £54.50 per hour)