

## Local Government Association Alert

18 June 2008

### Free Swimming to bring huge health benefits

Dear Colleague

You will have seen the government's announcement on 6 June that it intends to fund councils to provide free swimming for some groups, as a first step towards an aspiration to provide free swimming for everyone by 2012. The LGA has welcomed the government's intention to improve health by increasing physical activity. But there are a number of practical questions that remain to be decided before the free swimming policy is put into operation, and we wanted you brief you on how the details of this policy will emerge.

The attached note sets out the current state of the government's policy. We will be discussing with the government the detail of how it intends to distribute the funding it proposes to make available, and how that will be managed, over the next few weeks, and we have agreed that the government will reach firm conclusions by the end of July so councils are able to take account of the money in their budgets for next year. We will be working with the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers' Association (CLOA) on this, but please do contact Lyndsey Swift ([Lyndsey.Swift@lga.gov.uk](mailto:Lyndsey.Swift@lga.gov.uk)) if you have points you want to contribute directly to these discussions.

The government's longer term goal for free swimming for all by 2012 is only an aspiration at present and details, including how this could be funded, will need to be worked up with government. Many councils already provide free swimming, and overall, councils spend £1.2 billion a year on providing opportunities for people to play sport and participate in physical activities. Councils invest £450 million annually in improving sports facilities, and the government's extra contribution is a welcome addition.

Councils, who are the biggest investor in sport, will continue to work very closely with a refocused Sport England in improving sporting activities for local people. Many councils have already struck deals with Sport England with new Local Area Agreements. The LGA is confident of the renewed commitments to make a success of improving sporting participation in this way.

Yours sincerely  
Local Government Association

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### THE GOVERNMENTS OFFER TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- The package we are offering is a coherent series of funding programmes designed to extend opportunities to swim and to maximise the health benefits of wider participation in swimming.

- It applies to England (only) and builds on Local Authorities' commitment to swimming - including many existing schemes which provide some form of subsidised swimming for various target groups. It is also designed to help authorities achieve their goals for increased physical activity, which is among the most commonly selected national indicators for Local Area Agreements.
- The package applies to the last two years of the current settlement, i.e. 2009/10 and 2010/11, although there may be an amount of resource and capital in 2008/09. We shall use the evidence from these first two years to inform future funding and delivery arrangements.
- The £140m package includes three distinct elements:
  - (a) A fund to Local Authorities to allow them to introduce free swimming for people aged over 60;
  - (b) A further fund to Local Authorities to allow them to introduce further measures designed to promote increased participation in swimming, particularly for under 16s.

*Parts (a) and (b) of the package have been allocated £80 million revenue funding over the two years 2009/10 and 2010/11.*

  - (c) A capital fund of £60 million (£10 million for 2008/2009 £25 million for 2009/10 and £25 million for 2010/11) into which Local Authorities could bid for the renovation and maintenance of their pools (including school pools), in support of schemes under (a) and (b) above.
- In addition, the package will support initiatives such as the provision of free lessons for adults who cannot swim, and the introduction of swimming co-ordinators to maximise and sustain uptake.
- We intend to develop the details of the scheme (including its exact scope) by July this year, in close consultation with the Local Government Association and the Amateur Swimming Association. But the broad outlines of its operation are expected to be as follows:
  - no Local Authority forced to enter any element of the scheme, so there is no new entitlement to free swimming (but no grant made unless the authority undertakes to provide arrangements corresponding to those specified).
  - grants under (a) and (b) made on a population-based formula to unitary and district authorities. That sets the sum they get from Government if they agree to introduce the scheme.
  - costs and charges are not collected centrally, and vary greatly across the country but the best estimate of DCMS and DH analysts is that nationally the allocated revenue funding of £80 million would cover 75-100 per cent of the costs to Local Authorities of providing free swimming to the over 60s, and the top-up to Local Authorities who wish to extend their provision further to under 16s
  - the grants under (a), (b) and (c) to be administered either by CLG or by a specific agency such as Sport England or the Big Lottery Fund.