



free swimming.

worth making a splash about

INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

A £140m cross-Government initiative to enable local councils in England to offer free swimming to people 60 and over, and 16 and under.

Launched in June 2008 by the Government as a key part of the plans to secure a lasting legacy from the United Kingdom hosting the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012.

Free swimming began on 1 April 2009 and is guaranteed to run for at least two years, until March 2011 – the period covered by the Government's current Spending Review.

More than 20m people could benefit from the scheme at over 1,000 local authority pools and those run by education authorities (county councils) in state schools and with community access.

Take-up

261 councils (80 per cent of the total number of councils – covering 82 per cent of the population) are offering free swimming for people over 60.

199 councils (61 per cent of the total number of councils – covering 65 per cent of the population) are also offering it for young people aged 16 and under.

Local authorities cannot restrict free swimming to their own residents. Those eligible but covered by a council not participating in the scheme can swim free at a pool run by a council that is taking part.

Before this initiative, the number of local councils in England offering any form of year-round free swimming was barely in double figures.

Pools are run by London Borough, City, Borough, District and Unitary councils – although under special arrangements, some school pools owned by County Councils will also be offering free swimming. A full list of participating councils is available at www.culture.gov.uk/freeswimming

Funding

Allocations for free swimming funding are calculated on the basis of population for Pots 1, 2 and 3. Pot 4 funding is secured through a bidding process.

The £140m comprises:

Pot 1: Up to £15m per year (total £30m) made available for councils to provide free swimming for people over 60.

Pot 2: Up to £25m per year (total £50m) made available for councils to provide free swimming for people 16 and under.



Pot 3: £10m for 2008/09 made available to modernise pools – only to councils opting in to Pots 1 and 2.

The biggest grants for running costs (Pots 1 and 2) for 2009/10 and for modernisation work in 2008/09 have all gone to Birmingham City Council – respectively £248,027, £692,723 and £305,028.

Pot 4: £25m for 2009/10 and 10/11 (total £50m) made available to modernise pool provision – only to councils opting in to Pots 1 and 2.

Altogether £25m has been invested in 59 projects. Grants of over £1m have been offered to:

- Kirklees Metropolitan Council - £1.75m to Batley Leisure Centre for a replacement pool
- London Borough of Southwark - £1.47m for Camberwell Baths
- London Borough of Harrow - £1.27m for Hatch End School
- Leicestershire County Council - £1.18m for Ibstock Community College
- Calderdale Council - £1m for Brighouse Pool
- Waveney District Council -£1m for Waterlane Leisure Centre in Lowestoft
- Nottingham City Council - £1m for replacement for Noel Street Leisure Centre
- Shropshire Council –£1m to William Brookes School in Much Wenlock to help build a new pool

The scheme is jointly funded by the Department of Health, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Department for Work and Pensions, and Department for Communities and Local Government.

Funding is also being provided within the overall package to recruit a network of county swimming co-ordinators (working with local councils to promote interest in the scheme and swimming), offer 100,000 free swimming lessons and support participating councils, including rewarding those with the best record in developing the scheme and making an impact in their communities.

It is being delivered in conjunction with local authorities, the Local Government Association, the Amateur Swimming Association and Sport England, which is administering the Capital Modernisation Fund (Pot 4) for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Take-up

In the first nine months of the scheme there have been 13.66 million free swims (8.55 million by young people aged 16 or under, and 5.11 million by people aged 60 or over). Of the total 4.5 million swims were taken in Q1 (2.9m, 1.6m), 5.9 million in Q2 (4m, 1.9m), and 3.3 million in Q3 (1.7m, 1.6m).

The small print

It is up to local councils how they administer the scheme. We have however given clear guidance that:

1. People aged 16 or under and 60 or over must be able to swim at a time and place when they would normally expect to swim. This means councils cannot restrict free swimming to certain days or time slots. The only exception to this is that people aged 16 and under cannot swim during school hours of state schools.
2. Local Authorities may ask for ID to prove age each time a 'free swimmer' visits one of their pools. Councils may also issue a special card to be presented on every visit. They may make a nominal one-off charge to cover its cost.

Quotes

"This scheme is part of the 2012 'dividend' – a scheme inspired by our success in winning the right to stage the Olympics and Paralympics – and is going from strength to strength.

"More councils are joining up and offering more people the chance to swim for free – and each and every local authority that is part of the scheme deserves credit for backing it, often with their own money as well, and seeing the benefits that free swimming can provide every day for local communities."

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Ben Bradshaw



"Swimming has been a real passion of mine since I took it up as a small child. But I was really jumping in the deep end when I swam the English Channel for Sport Relief, fitting training in between performances on the road of Little Britain Live. I hope that by making swimming free for so many in this country we will encourage people to find the time to swim.

"Just a few lengths is a really great way of getting active and staying healthy. I am right behind this initiative and I hope that millions of people will grab the opportunity and take the plunge."

Actor and comedian David Walliams

"The Free Swimming initiative is a great idea that deserves to succeed, and can only do good. I am delighted to endorse it, and hope that people will dive in and enjoy the benefits."

TV and radio presenter Sir Terry Wogan

"No matter what your age, swimming is an amazing sport and a great way to stay fit and healthy. I look forward to seeing pools up and down the country being used to their full potential and maybe even creating Olympic stars of the future!"

Double Olympic Gold medallist Rebecca Adlington

Swimming..... is the most popular participation sport in this country. Sport England's Active People survey for 2008/09 showed that 3.16m people – around 1 in 14 of the adult population – swam for at least 30 minutes a week. That was more than 1 million more than the next most popular – football.

