


<b>Cabinet</b>  11 September 2024	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Simon Baxter, Corporate Director Communities	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Free Swimming Programme</b>	

<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Kamrul Hussain, Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation.
<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Keith Townsend Programme Director - Leisure Simon Jones, Head of Leisure Operations
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Reason for Key Decision</b>	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
<b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt information</b>	No
<b>Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome</b>	4. Boosting culture, business, jobs, and leisure 5. Investing in public services

### Executive Summary

This report provides an updated position in respect of the proposed free-swimming programme as part the *Be Well* leisure service, which came in-house on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024. The focus of the programme will be to target the offer of free swimming for women and girls over 16 and men over 55, informed by public health intelligence and local health inequality data in support of those in the communities who face the largest health and physical activity barriers. The council has approved revenue funding growth on £0.248 million in 2024/25 as part of the annual budget process in February 2024. The free-swimming programme commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> July.

### Recommendations

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the rationale for introducing a targeted free-swimming programme for women and girls over 16 and men over 55 as detailed in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.8.
2. Note and endorse the proposed approach and phasing for a new free-swimming programme detailed in paragraphs 3.9 to 3.17.
3. Agree to the development of further detailed proposals for developing creche facilities.
4. Agree to officers monitoring the usage of the free-swimming programme and authorise the Head of Leisure Operations to make minor amendments to the programme, following consultation with the Lead Member.

## **1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The council has approved annual funding of £0.248M to support increased participation in swimming of groups that are more likely to be inactive. Both women and girls and older adults are less likely to be physically active than men and boys and younger residents respectively. These inequalities are even greater amongst diverse communities and when considering intersectionality. It is therefore important that Cabinet are fully aware of this important targeted intervention as part of the new insourced *Be Well* leisure service.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 The council could consider focusing on paid for swimming offer for targeted groups. However, it is considered that this it would be unlikely to achieve the level take up by the target audiences. There is the option to increase the number of women-only, free-swimming sessions.

## **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

### **Background**

- 3.1 The council has six operational sports and leisure centres, and one (St George's Leisure Centre) which is currently closed and part of a major leisure and social housing redevelopment project. Of those four of the centres have, or will have swimming pools:
  - Mile End Leisure Centre and Stadium
  - Poplar Baths, Leisure Centre & Gym, Poplar
  - Tiller Leisure Centre, Isle of Dogs
  - York Hall Leisure Centre Spa, Bethnal Green
  - St. George's Leisure Centre, Wapping – closed for redevelopment.

## Rationale for Change

- 3.2 Since 2010, more than 1,000 publicly accessible pools including around 450 local authority owned pools, have closed either permanently or temporarily, whereas the council is investing £39 million in the new St George's Leisure Centre.
- 3.3 The *Be Well* leisure service aims to raise the quality of life for the Tower Hamlets community through three pillars: Health, Wellness and Play.
- **Health** - Providing excellent services to enable healthy lifestyles.
  - **Wellness** - Removing barriers to create inclusive and accessible environments.
  - **Play** - Supporting local groups and clubs to bring communities together.
- 3.4 Swim England as part of a study of over 80,000 people showed:
- Swimmers have a 28% lower risk of early death.
  - 41% lower risk death due to heart disease and stroke.
  - Evidence that swimmers live longer, that regular swimming helps older people stay mentally and physically fit.
- 3.5 The study also showed that regular swimming can help to reduce long-term health conditions with regular physical activity such as swimming can reduce occurrences of chronic diseases by 20-40%.
- 3.6 A consultation exercise undertaken November 2021 and January 2022 indicated that 20% of online responses feature requests for urgent action to be taken to improve the swimming offer. Various significant barriers to access to the existing leisure service were also identified (e.g. cleanliness issues across centres, GLL's website and booking system deemed challenging to navigate, lack of women only spaces and activities, inconvenient scheduling, lack of access to childcare etc.).

## Health Inequalities

- 3.7 Tower Hamlets health inequality intelligence and data has been taken into consideration when developing the programme. It shows that:
- Women are less likely to be active than men (28% compared to 23%).
  - Girls are less likely to be active than boys (50% compared to 40%)
  - People aged 65+ are less likely to be active than younger people (65% compared to <28% for all other ages).
  - People from Asian, Black, or Other backgrounds are less likely to be active than people with white background (40% Asian population inactive compared to 17% from White British background).
  - People living in more deprived areas and on low incomes are less likely to be active than those living in more affluent areas (29% of IMD 1-2 inactive, compared to 13% in IMD 9-10) Low healthy life expectancy and a 7-year gap

between men (65 years) and women (58 years) with wider gaps in Asian and Mixed ethnic groups with a high prevalence of females who are long-term unemployed.

- The number of reported cases of diabetes within women in the borough, 78% come from the BAME background compared to 22% who came from a white background.
- National data also shows that people living with long term conditions or disability are less likely to be active than those without (43% compared to 23%).

## **Swim Safety**

3.8 In Tower Hamlets, swim and water safety are important considerations given the proximity of the river Thames and in the context that:

- 46% of drownings occur in the summer months and this rises to 75% amongst 13 to 17 year olds.
- Only half of ethnically diverse communities are able to swim 25 metres, in comparison to 14% of white communities.
- Females of all ethnicities are less likely to be able to swim 25 metres.

## **Free Swimming Programme Proposal**

3.9 The free-swimming programme has been developed around a bookable 'core offer' of 37,600 free swimming sessions per year incorporated into the existing "Swim for Fitness" offer and forms part of the overall pool programming timetable including school swimming sessions and swimming lessons. This would offer customers more choice of when they could swim. Additional services will be made available in phases later in the year.

3.10 It is proposed for the programme to be introduced in three phases:

### **3.11 Phase 1: Core Free Swimming Offer (July 2024)**

Free swimming sessions have been introduced enabling 723 sessions per week incorporated at each of the four swimming pools. Of those sessions, 42 are women only swimming sessions.

The table below shows a summary of the annual "Swim for Fitness" current programmed hours.

**Table 1: Total Number of “Swim For Fitness” (including Women Only) Sessions (p.a.)**

<b>Total Hours Public</b>	<b>Total Hours Women Only</b>	<b>Total Capacity Public (customer sessions)</b>	<b>Total Capacity Women Only (Customer sessions)</b>	<b>Total Capacity “Swim for Fitness” (Customer sessions)</b>
13,325	624	544,700	38,740	<b>583,440</b>

The proposed 37,600 free swimming sessions p.a. represents c.6.5% of the total Swim for fitness capacity to be made available for free swimming. The detailed timetables for each site are shown in Appendix 1.

It is proposed to initially make up to 25% of the total “Swim for Fitness” capacity available for the Free-Swimming Programme of which 5% would be for ‘walk in’ customers who are less confident booking by via digital means. This will allow for the scheme to grow depending on demand by providing total free-swimming capacity of 2,805 sessions per week of which 186 would be Women Only sessions.

It is proposed to have a 3-month review based upon service take up to allow amendments to the programme to be made.

**3.12 Phase 2: Swimming Lessons and Coaching Clinics (September 2024)**

It is proposed to pilot targeted, free lessons and coaching session to encourage new and more confident swimmers. Again, the proposed approach is to integrate those coaching and teaching sessions into the existing swim teaching programme. The lessons will be based on running 12-week courses for up to eight non-swimmers for each pool. It is proposed to run this four times a year and it will provide free lessons for up to 128 new swimmers.

The swim clinics would provide the additional support to new swimmers i.e. supporting those with basic swimming ability but potentially lacking in confidence to swim on their own. The clinics will involve trained coaches being available at specific swimming sessions and provide advice and support to individuals and groups to build confidence, help with technique and provide general reassurance.

**3.13 Phase 3 (November 2024):** Potential new creche (either physical or ‘pop up’ facilities at the centres to encourage additional take up of the programme).

**3.14** The service is currently reviewing options for introducing creche facilities at leisure centres alongside additional Women Only facilities. Whilst the level of demand isn’t known at this point, there are options for using less well-used spaces at Poplar using the former café space, Mile End Stadium and Tiller Leisure Centre using a meeting room. York Hall is more restricted in terms of space.

- 3.15 The option of 'pop-up' facilities delivered by an external childcare provider is being investigated alongside the registration and regulatory requirements as this might provide a more flexible approach until we have a clearer understanding of the demand and impact of this offer on uptake and inequalities.
- 3.16 The programme has been designed to achieve 10% of new users who have not used the council's swimming pools before. In addition, the programme will support the council's KPI in relation to increasing the number of leisure centre users who are women (target of 5% increase).
- 3.17 The programme will also deliver:
- 128 Adults on the Learn to Swim programme.
  - Coaching sessions as part of the free-swimming sessions to build new-swimmer confidence.
  - 723 free swimming sessions per week of which 46 sessions will be Women Only.

### **Customer Journey**

- 3.18 A new free-swimming membership has been set up via the Leisure IT system meaning customers will be able to register for a free swim membership online and at the leisure facilities and will be asked to provide evidence of age and postcode (to ensure that they are residents). Membership cards will be issued which will allow the service to capture data of usage and build a picture of how the programme is operating.
- 3.19 Bookable sessions will be shown on the web page (and linked to the leisure IT system), via the App (once it goes live) and at the leisure centres for those customers who are less confident booking via digital means. 'Walk-in' spaces will also be available. The sessions will be for 1 hour with a maximum number available on the system to avoid overcrowding.

### **Project Timetable**

- 3.20 The programme was officially launched on 15<sup>th</sup> July at Poplar Leisure Centre and Baths and will involve key partners including the Royal Life Saving Society and Swim England.
- 3.21 Swimming lessons will be available From September 2024 and the creche available for targeted sessions from November 2024.

### **Financial Implications**

3.22 The council has approved £0.248M per annum from 2024/25 to develop and run the programme. The total cost of the programme was based on using the actual rate for a concession swim (£5). The additional cost of providing the new programme is for providing additional swimming lessons and coaching, targeted marketing and free creche facilities. The details of the investment are shown in the table below:

Item	Cost (£000s)
Coaching & Lessons – Adult Learn to Swim and Clinics*	30
Targeted marketing	5
Childcare – Creche**	25
Free swimming sessions (37,600)***	188
<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>

\*from September 2024    \*\*from November 2024    \*\*\*based on TH concession rate of £5 per session

## Marketing & Communications Plan

3.23 Marketing and communications will be via the council’s usual channels i.e. the website, banners and posters, local media, and social media channels. Targeted marketing will also take place through key council services and external stakeholders including primary and secondary care partners, Early Help information services and health improvement commissioned services.

## Data & Analysis

3.24 The council will be able to quantify the impact of the programme using a social value calculator tool developed by 4 Global and Sheffield Hallam University. This will enable the council to monetise the social value of the programme in terms of physical and mental health, mental wellbeing, individual development, and social and community development.

3.25 One of the challenges the council faces is the lack of specific usage data held and supplied by GLL in relation to the site and sessions demand for “Swim for Fitness” sessions. Whilst the service knows the peak operating times, detailed data is only starting to be collected. As the free-swimming programme develops careful use of usage data will allow adjustments to be made depending on capacity and demand. It is therefore proposed to review the programme after three months in October 2024).

## 4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The free-swimming programme is considered to have a positive equalities implication on specific targeted groups i.e. women and girls over 16 and men over 55 with a specific aim of a 10% increase in new swimmers. The programme seeks to encourage participation and therefore contribute to tackling health inequalities in Tower Hamlets.

## 5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

### **Best Value Implications**

5.2 The revenue budget for the service has been developed using a zero-base approach and modelled over a 10-year period showing income growth and an operating surplus from year four.

5.3 This programme has the potential to achieve wider health and wellbeing benefits as well as increasing participation from within existing swimming capacity available to customers.



5.4 The impact and performance of the free-swimming programme will be carefully monitored and analysed using membership and usage data on a site-by-site basis. The scheme will be reviewed every three months and amendments made in accordance with recommendation 4 of this report.

### **Consultations**

5.5 Consultation activity was referred to within paragraph 3.6.

### **Programme Risks and Mitigations**

5.6 The risks that have been identified in the development of the free-swimming programme. Risks are identified and managed within an integrated project framework by the Leisure Board.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>Mitigating Actions</b>	<b>Residual Risk Score</b>
<b>Demand</b> Difficult to predict demand levels resulting in low or excessive demand for free-swimming.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful monitoring of free-swimming membership data</li> <li>• Ability to cap capacity of Swim for Fitness sessions that can be booked.</li> </ul>	



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjustments to programme to increase demand.</li> <li>• Targeted marketing of programme</li> </ul>	
<b>Customer Satisfaction</b> Lack of bookable swimming capacity for existing members	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful monitoring of free-swimming membership and usage data</li> <li>• Adjustments to programming</li> </ul>	6

## **6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 The 2024/25 budget included growth of £248k for free swimming activities. A breakdown of the proposed spend totalling this amount is included at paragraph 3.22 of the report.
- 6.2 Estimated operating costs of the creche have been included but if after further investigation there are capital requirements for crèche facilities, there is no currently approved funding.

## **7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 The Council is legally obliged to take such steps as it thinks appropriate to improve the health of the people in the Council's area. There are clear health benefits linked to swimming and therefore the measures referred to in this report may reasonably be considered appropriate and in line with the legislation.
- 7.2 The Council will implement monitoring of the take up and other aspects of the offer. This will then inform future decision as to how to deliver statutory best value of both this element of the leisure function as well as the related health benefits.
- 7.3 The Council has the legal function to provide leisure related services although it is not legally obliged to do so. However, should it decide to provide swimming it has a wide discretion to determine the manner of that provision and whether or not it should be subsidised. Therefore, the proposals in this report are lawful.

### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

None.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables

#### **Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012**

None.

**Officer contact details for documents:**

N/A

## Free Swimming Programme Summary

### Total Number of “Swim For Fitness” including Women Only Sessions (Per week)

	Total Hours Public (Per week)	Total Hours Women Only (Per week)	Total Capacity Public (customer sessions)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer sessions)	Total Capacity “Swim for Fitness” (customer sessions)
York Hall	60.25	3	2,185	130	2,315
Mile End	79.75	6	3,575	345	3,920
Poplar	79.25	4	2,940	220	3,160
Tiller	37	1	1,775	50	1,825
<b>TOTAL</b>	256.25	14	10,475	745	11,220

### Total Number of “Swim For Fitness” (including Women Only) Sessions (Per year)

	Total Hours Public (Per year)	Total Hours Women Only (Per year)	Total Capacity Public (customer session)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer session)	Total Capacity “Swim for Fitness” (customer sessions)
<b>TOTAL</b>	13,325	624	544,700	38,740	583,440

- The Free Swimming Programme proposed 37,600 free swimming sessions p.a. In order to achieve that level, c.6.5% of the total “Swim for Fitness” capacity will be required. This provides 723 free swimming sessions per week of which 46 will be Women Only sessions.

## Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables



- It is proposed to initially make up to 25% of the total “Swim for Fitness” capacity available for the Free Swimming Programme of which 5% would be for ‘walk in’ Free Swimming customers. This will allow for the scheme to grow depending on demand.
- This will provide total free swimming capacity of 2,805 sessions per week of which 186 would be Women Only sessions.

### Free Swimming Programme – York Hall Leisure Centre

Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Saturday			Sunday		
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Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time			
275	P	06:30-12:00	130	P	06:30-09:15	150	P	06:30-09:30	150	P	06:30-09:30	125	P	06:30-09:15	210	P	09:00-16:00	165	P	09:00-14:30			
50	WO	12:30-13:30	30	P	09:15-12:30	240	P	09:30-15:30	120	P	09:30-12:30	10	P	13:30-14:30									
100	P	13:30-15:30	30	P	13:30-15:30				30	P	12:30-13:30	50	P	14:30-15:30									
			30	WO	19:00-20:00				100	P	13:30-16:00	180	P	15:30-21:30									
			50	WO	20:30-21:30				90	P	18:30-21:30												
375		7.5	190		8	390		9	490		12.5	365		10.75	210		7	165		5.5			
+50		+1	+80		+2																		

Total Hours Public (Per week)	Total Hours Women Only (Per week)	Total Capacity Public (customer hours)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer hours)
60.25	3	2185	130

Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables



Cap = Capacity      Sess = Session Type      P = Public      WO = Women Only

**Free Swimming Programme – Mile End Leisure Centre**

Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Saturday			Sunday					
Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time			
160	P	07:00 - 09:00	160	P	07:00 - 09:00	80	P	07:00 09:00	160	P	07:00 - 09:00	160	P	07:00 - 09:00	285	P	08:00 - 17:30	300	P	08:00 - 18:00			
105	P	09:00 - 12:30	105	WO	10:00 - 13:15	105	P	09:00 - 12:30	105	P	09:00 - 12:30	90	P	09:00 - 12:00									
80	P	12:30 - 13:30	75	P	13:30 - 16:00	80	WO	12:30 - 13:15	80	P	12:30 - 13:30	80	P	12:30 - 13:30									
105	P	13:30 - 16:00	200	P	17:00 - 21:00	75	P	13:30 - 16:00	70	P	13:30 - 16:00	75	P	13:30 - 16:00									
175	P	17:00 - 20:30	80	P	21:00 - 22:00	240	P	18:00 - 21:00	50	P	17:00 - 18:00	120	P	17:00 - 20:15									
120	P	20:30 - 22:00							240	P	18:00 - 22:00	160	WO	20:15 - 22:00									
745		14	515 +105		9.5 + 3.25	500 +80		11 +1	705		14	525 +160		11.75 +1.75	285		9.5	300		10			

Total Hours Public (Per week)	Total Hours Women Only (Per week)	Total Capacity Public (customer hours)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer hours)
79.75	6	3575	345

Cap = Capacity      Sess = Session Type      P = Public      WO = Women Only

## Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables



### Free Swimming Programme – Poplar Leisure Centre

Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Saturday			Sunday		
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Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time
150	P	06:30 - 09:00	150	P	06:30 - 09:00	150	P	08:30 - 09:00	150	P	06:30 - 09:00	150	P	06:30 - 09:00	60	P	08:00 - 09:00	60	P	08:00 - 09:00
70	P	09:00 - 12:30	70	P	09:00 - 12:30	70	P	09:00 - 12:30	70	P	09:00 - 12:30	70	P	09:00 - 12:30	20	P	09:00 -11:15	200	P	09:00 - 14:00
60	P	12:30 - 13:30	60	WO	12:30 - 13:30	60	P	12:30 - 13:30	60	P	12:30 - 13:30	60	P	12:30 - 13:30	100	P	11:30- 14:00	60	P	14:00 - 15:00
30	P	13:30 - 15:00	30	P	13:30 - 15:00	30	P	13:30 - 15:00	30	P	13:30 - 15:00	30	P	13:30 - 15:00	120	p	14:00 - 16:00	60	WO	15:30 - 16:15
60	P	15:00 - 16:00	60	P	15:00 - 16:00	60	P	15:00 - 16:00	60	P	15:00 - 16:00	60	P	15:00 - 16:00						
20	P	16:00 - 18:00	40	P	16:00 - 20:00	20	P	16:00 - 18:00	80	P	16:00 - 18:00	80	P	16:00 - 18:00						
40	P	18:00 - 20:00				30	WO	18:30 - 19:30				180	P	18:00 - 21:00						
60	P	20:00 - 21:00				10	WO*	18:30 - 19:30												
						60	WO	20:00 - 21:00												
490		14.5	350 +60		12.5 +1	390 +100		11.5 +2	450		11.5	640		14.5	300		7.75	320 +60		7+1

Total Hours Public (Per week)	Total Hours Women Only (Per week)	Total Capacity Public (customer hours)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer hours)
79.25	4	2940	220

\*Women only toddler session

Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables



Cap = Capacity    Sess = Session Type    P = Public    WO = Women Only

**Free Swimming Programme – Tiller Leisure Centre**

Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Saturday			Sunday		
Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time	Cap	Sess	Time
125	P	06:30-09:00	125	P	06:30-09:00	125	P	06:30-09:00	125	P	6:30-9:00	125	P	6:30-9:00	225	P	8:00-12:30	200	P	8:00-12:00
50	P	12:30-13:30	50	P	12:30-13:30	50	P	12:30-13:30	50	P	12:30-13:30	50	P	12:30-13:30						
150	P	18:30-21:30	120	P	18:30-21:30	60	P	18:30-20:00	50	WO	19:00-20:00	100	P	17:30-19:30						
						45	P	20:00-21:30					P							
325		6.5	295		6.5	280		6.5	175+50		3.5+1	275		5.5	225		4.5	200		4

Total Hours Public (Per week)	Total Hours Women Only (Per week)	Total Capacity Public (customer hours)	Total Capacity Women Only (customer hours)
37	1	1775	50

Cap = Capacity    Sess = Session Type    P = Public    WO = Women Only



## Appendix 1: Free Swimming Programme Centre Timetables

