


Cabinet 9 February 2022	
Report of: James Thomas Corporate Director Children & Culture	Classification: Unrestricted
Response to Scrutiny Recommendations on the Swimming Provision in the Borough	

Lead Member	Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Sport
Originating Officer(s)	Lisa Pottinger, Head of Sports and Physical Activity
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	24 January 2022
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	<p><u>Priority 1</u> People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children and young people are protected so they get the best start in life and can realise their potential. 2. People access joined-up services when they need them and feel healthier and more independent. 3. Inequality is reduced and people feel that they fairly share the benefits from growth. <p><u>Priority 2</u> A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community. <p><u>Priority 3</u> A dynamic, outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People say we are open and transparent putting residents at the heart of everything we do. 2. People say we work together across boundaries in a strong and effective partnership to achieve the best outcomes for our residents

Reasons for Urgency

The Chair of Overview & Scrutiny has requested that the scrutiny recommendations from the O&S Swimming Challenge be considered alongside decisions on the Leisure Estate Investment Report being submitted to Cabinet at the same meeting.

Executive Summary

This report submits the Executive response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Challenge Session report recommendations which examined Swimming provision in the borough.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is recommended to

1. Consider the Overview and Scrutiny Challenge Session Report (Appendix 1) on Swimming Provision in the Borough
2. Agree the Action Plan (Appendix 2) in response to the recommendations.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To provide a formal response to the OSC recommendations as per requirement of the council constitution.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To take no action. This is not recommended as the scrutiny challenge session provides recommendations for swimming provision in the borough and recognises that residents and schools highly value these provisions and the importance of access for local stakeholders.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic is an unprecedented event that has placed significant pressure on Council resources. The national lockdown restrictions imposed from 20th March 2020 has had a profound impact on leisure provision, not only nationally, but also in Tower Hamlets.
- 3.2 The 2021 Swim England Report “A Decade of Decline” forcefully articulated the impact of Covid on the country’s leisure industry by stating, “Since the pandemic began 206 pools have closed, either permanently or temporarily, including 68 public pools”. The Local Government Association (LGA) also stated, “As largely discretionary services ... (culture and leisure budgets) will be under huge pressure as a result of the current gap in Council’s finances... Pre-Covid evidence suggests that when local of authority budgets are

reduced, it is discretionary services like leisure that bear the brunt of cuts” However, despite the significant financial challenges that Tower Hamlets faces, a commitment has been made to maintaining five pools in the borough and the Council has invested £2.2 million of leisure centre improvement funding over the last two years. This investment has enabled Tiller Leisure Centre to reopen on 3rd January 2022 with York Hall estimated to re-open in April when the repair works to the pool are completed.

- 3.3 The pandemic also magnified local health inequalities with children in Tower Hamlets more likely to be overweight or obese at year 6 than in London or England¹. Compliance with Covid-19 safety measure such as shielding or self-isolating has acted as a catalyst to an increase in loneliness, sedentary lifestyle and a lack of regular physical activity and exercise.
- 3.4 Swim England suggests that a single 25 metre pool can generate £7.2 million in social value in community savings and also save the NHS and social care more than £1.2 million. They have also warned that nationally 90% of 7- to 11-year-olds are failing to meet minimum standards that have been brought in for swimming lessons outside of school. Swimming is considered as an essential life skill that, in extreme circumstances, can make the difference between life and death and moreover, it provides a means to rehabilitate people who have been injured aiding their recovery.
- 3.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a scrutiny challenge session on 13th September 2021 focussing on the level and quality of swimming provision in the borough and it was chaired by Cllr Denise Jones.
- 3.6 The challenge session was underpinned by the following:
- Are schools in the borough meeting their statutory duty in providing lessons in swimming and water safety to all primary school children?
 - What is the short-term plan (over next 12 months) to provide adequate, affordable and accessible swimming provision for residents (as part of the communities recovery from covid)?
 - How the long-term plan is being developed and what will be included in future provision?
 - What provisions have ceased since St Georges, Tiller and York Hall were closed? What plans are in place to replace these now?
 - What is the communication and engagement plan to inform residents about the short-term and long-term plans?
- 3.7 The challenge session involved a range of stakeholders including:
- Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Sports and supported by council officers;

¹ [Child Obesity Borough Profile](#)

- Head of Service for Greenwich Leisure Ltd;
- Head Teacher St Saviour's CE Primary School;
- Resident representative; and
- Overview aThnd Scrutiny Committee Members.

3.8 The challenge session resulted in the committee making the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

That the Overview and Scrutiny be provided with the leisure centre review report and be engaged with the:

- Next steps on leisure centre contract extension
- Public consultation and procurement of new leisure contract

Recommendation 2

That the council examines and supports options for catch up swimming sessions for children who missed lessons because of lockdown and review viability of different swimming programmes offered and how these would be reinstated. That the Mayor should review the budget so that swimming provisions (pre Covid-19) can be reinstated

Recommendation 3

Greenwich Leisure Ltd and the council to explore promptly how to address the travel challenges faced by schools in the borough so that children can access swimming provision

Recommendation 4

The council to consider if covid funding or reserves can be used to support swimming provision

Recommendation 5

The council to examine the different options of keeping St Georges Pool on existing site, noting the strong lobby from residents and cross party support to keep the pool where it is. That details of financial planning for reopening St George's is shared transparently with the Committee

Recommendation 6

The council to develop a long-term capital investment strategy for leisure centres to ensure that they can be maintained to good standards including where needed major refurbishments. This should also include establishing a Lido and other new swimming provision in the borough. Leisure provision in Borough for the future should consider taking the projected rise in the population on board

Recommendation 7

GLL and council communications to assist with wider reach to parents, dispelling myths swimming in the winter season will cause colds and better visibility of consultations

- 3.7 The Action Plan in Appendix 2 provides a response to these recommendations. Progress has been on a number of the report recommendations. To date the following have been delivered.
- Intensive swimming sessions were delivered in the October 2021 Half-term and were extremely successful. Further sessions are being planned for the 2022 February Half-term, East Holiday and May Half-term and will be demand led, based on school need.
 - Free transport has been provided for schools to access swimming lessons
 - The Leisure Estate Investment Plan report has been completed and will be presented to Cabinet on 9th February 2022. This report will articulate the various options for refurbishment or redevelopment of leisure provision in the south west of the borough. In addition, an investment strategy for the leisure centres going forward will be outlined for review and decision.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The challenge session examined the impact on availability and access to swimming provision in the borough. The recommendations arising from the scrutiny challenge aim to improve access for a diverse range of residents including children and young people, disabled residents, elderly residents and those from low-income families.

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.
- 5.2 No other statutory implications have been identified.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 Any additional costs in providing transport for Schools to access swimming provision will be considered through use of the current Education budgets, including the use of available transport resource. The financial implications of possible capital works would be considered separately in both the future capital plan and leisure management report and therefore any recommendations in this report could only be considered within future reports in relation to cost and available funding.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council does not have the legal duty to provide swimming facilities. However, it has the legal function so to do if it wishes. However, the Council has the legal duty to undertake such steps as it thinks it is appropriate for the protection and or improvement of health of children in the borough. Therefore, the Council has the legal powers to undertake the recommendations stated in this report.
- 7.2 The report refers to a number of areas where expenditure may be incurred in the fulfilment of these strategies. Such expenditure may only be undertaken in respect of third parties following a call for competition where responses are evaluated on a most economically advantageous basis. This will contribute to discharging the Council's best value duty in this regard.
- 7.3 Such subsequent expenditure will be subject to separate approvals in accordance with the Council's constitution.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Overview and Scrutiny Challenge Session Report on Swimming Provision in the Borough.
- Appendix 2: Swimming Provision in the Borough – Service Action Plan.

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

- None.

Officer contact details for documents:

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