

SWIMMING PROVISION IN HEREFORD CITY AND SURROUNDING AREA

**Report By: Head Of Commissioning & Improvement
(Schools And Services)**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To consider the alternatives for making provision for school swimming in Hereford City and inform the Cabinet Member of the preferred option.

Financial Implications

2. There are both capital and revenue consequences on future options for swimming provision, which are explained in more detail in the report.

Background

The St Martin's (LEA) Pool

3. Prior to 1974 and the existence of any indoor public swimming pool in Hereford, Herefordshire Education Committee decided to build the swimming pool at St Martin's designed specifically for swimming tuition. The pool opened in 1975. Since then this pool has provided a valuable service to at least 40% of Primary Schools in the County i.e. to those either in or closer to Hereford City. In the Autumn Term of 2007, 38 Primary Schools used the pool with an average of 1,170 pupils per week. Two Schools, Clehonger Primary and Canon Pyon Primary, opted to use the Leisure Pool to secure the same session throughout the whole year, which was not offered to them from the LEA Pool. These are listed in Appendix 1.
 4. It is a National Curriculum requirement that all pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 are able to swim 25 metres, and have a knowledge and understanding of water safety matters. The St Martin's Pool has a very good record in ensuring children reach this standard with very few children not obtaining this level.
 5. Other schools in the county use alternative swimming provision successfully. Whilst this group of primary schools values the use of St Martin's Pool there is a strategic consideration to be given to on-going capital and revenue costs and the implications of the council supporting both the St Martin's Pool and the HALO arrangements in terms of value for money.
- #### Current Position
6. The St Martin's Pool closed in December 2007 following the failure of a heat exchange unit. Interim facilities for those schools that were programmed to use the pool in the Spring Term were offered by HALO in Hereford Leisure Pool. These interim arrangements are not ideal as they were introduced at short notice although many of the issues could be overcome.

7. Various problems have been highlighted by schools including:
- a) The distance and time taken to move pupils from buses in the front car park, through the Leisure Pool to the changing rooms to the rear;
 - b) The limited size of the changing rooms (which were built to serve the King George V playing field pitches) for larger groups of children. Children have had to change and leave clothes in adjoining shower areas;
 - c) The inappropriate height of the coat pegs;
 - d) The distance between changing rooms and main pool, and the unsuitable floor surfaces, which have led to some children slipping;
 - e) The sharing of the pool with other users;
 - f) The poor acoustics and gradient of pool floor making teaching more difficult;
 - g) The lack of toilet facilities, other than attached to public changing areas, next to the pool; and
 - h) The mixing of children dressed for swimming and the public using other water spaces, the sauna, or the viewing gallery.
8. There have been discussions with HALO over these issues, and the advice of the Property (Operations) Manager has been sought.
9. HALO have undertaken to ensure that the main pool can be dedicated to school use during term times, and public/pupil contact will be removed during any lesson.
10. HALO have also stated that larger changing rooms are available, and in a permanent arrangement it will be possible to allocate the larger changing rooms to those schools with larger groups. Child protection issues are also being addressed.
11. Schools have valued the St Martin's Pool in the past because it is a very safe environment in which children can learn to swim. Once in the building, children can be supervised in changing, showering, toileting, and swimming in the water itself. There are no members of the public present, and all adults will have been subject to a CRB check.
12. If the decision is made to use the Hereford Leisure Pool Facilities, the Business Manager Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board will have talks with the Head of Operations, Halo Leisure Services to ensure that Safeguarding procedures are in place. This piece of work has already commenced across Leisure Facilities in general, however specific dialogue has recently been undertaken with regard to this proposal. To ensure that any Safeguarding issues are addressed, these officers have agreed to discuss this again in more detail when the decision has been made.
- Revenue Costs**
13. The total expenditure for the pool in 2007/08 was estimated to reach £160,000 compared to a centrally held budget of £80,000. The net costs (once income from school use is taken into account at £66.00 per hour) amount to £130,000. A further analysis estimates that the cost of water, energy and rates have increased by £27,000 since 2005/06, and income has fallen by £42,000.

14. The analysis of costs and usage over the past three years reveals that the average total costs amount to approximately £150,000 per annum, and annual usage involves 856 hours by schools and approximately 500 hours by third parties. School use involves the employment of swimming instructors and lifeguards, which, with the pool operating costs, equate to £138.00 per hour. Use by third parties does not involve, generally, provision of lifeguards, and costs associated with club use equates to £85.00 per hour. In any future service level agreement with schools, charges of £138.00 per hour would be anticipated. This compares to the current charging rate in this and other pools of £66.00 per hour. Before any decision is made on capital investment, a commitment from schools that they would be willing to pay the increased hourly rate for the St Martin's Pool, which covered outgoings, is required.
15. Charges for use of the Leisure Pool are equal to those in other public pools operated by HALO i.e. £66.00 per hour.

Capital Issues

16. Both pools would require capital investment for continued use by schools.

A – St Martin's Pool

Early in December 2007, the heat exchange unit failed. Initially, Property (Operations) Manager advised that the repair cost of this and corrosion to steelwork would be in the order of £20,000, and require the closure of the pool for four to five week period. Since then a detailed inspection has indentified a longer list of maintenance works to bring the pool back into working order:

1	Replacement of corroded heat exchange unit	£5,000.00
2	Repairs to spalding concrete structural elements	£8,000.00
3	Repairs to corroded steelwork at low level	£5,000.00
4	Provision of emergency lighting to main pool area	£6,000.00
5	Repairs to glazed tiles in the main pool following draining	£2,500.00
6	Repairs to skimmer channels to prevent water leakage	£20,000.00
7	Replacement of chlorine dosing plant	£6,000.00
8	Works to sand filters	£20,000.00

Total Cost including Fees	£72,500.00
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17. The total cost of this work and associated fees has been estimated to be £72,500. It maybe possible to delay some of this work, e.g. replacement of chlorine dosing plant, but if this was not done now, it will be required in the next 2-3 years. It is also possible that some work on the skimmer elements could be more extensive and hence more costly. There is no specific budget for this, and if it was deemed to be a priority it could be considered against the composite school maintenance capital programme at the cost of some other maintenance work at a school which would be deferred to 2009/10, or against S.106 monies already received from South Wye Housing developments. Any use of S.106 monies will need to meet the terms of the legal agreement with the development.

18. Even after this work were to be undertaken, over the next two to three years it is envisaged that other areas will need attention. These are:
- i) Replacement boilers. These have failed already, and have been welded in a temporary repair. Their life is uncertain
 - ii) It is recommended that the pool be connected to the Trend Energy Management System if it is to continue to open. (£10,000.00)
 - iii) Insulation levels generally poor and should be improved as part of the Local Authority approach to good environmental management.
 - iv) There is no heat recycling provision so energy conservation is very poor
19. Improvements to insulation levels could be pursued to the extreme, which would effectively involve the rebuilding of the pool. However, reasonable standards on insulation and the works identified in paragraphs 16 and 18 could be achieved within a budget of £282,000.
20. This list of outstanding work is not a result of lack of maintenance in the past. Appendix 2 identifies what work has been done. Although the building was only opened in 1975, the roof and engineering equipment had to be replaced in association with an upgrade of mechanical and electrical services in 1990/91. The warm moist chlorinated atmosphere has a corrosive effect on the fabric of the building. In terms of managing the building as an asset, it does require either considerable investment to secure long term cost effective use or closure.

Capital Issues

B – Herefordshire Leisure Pool

21. This building is of better quality and has higher environmental performance. Problems encountered in the interim use of the Leisure Pool could be overcome by the investment of £31,240 (Improvements to the existing front entrance, redecoration of changing rooms, adjusting the height of the coat pegs and re-flooring and lighting the corridors) or, if the benefits could justify the creation of a school specific entrance, of £33,490.
22. The dimensions of the pool could not be altered, nor could the relationship of changing rooms, toilets and pool, but difficulties in these areas could be minimised by the way in which the facilities and pupils are managed.

CONCLUSION

23. Scrutiny Committee are asked to offer a view to inform the decision which is needed by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services as soon as possible to allow the facilities and programme to be put in place for September 2008. There are two broad options.

Option A

24. The first is to make improvements in the St Martin's Pool. In capital terms it should be assumed that a budget of approximately £72,500 would be needed to achieve this,

but in the longer term, the estimated £282,000, would be needed to overcome some of the inherent inadequacies of the building. It is possible that some funding would be available from S.106 agreements for investment in educational facilities in the South Wye area though there are likely to be other projects in this area similarly requiring investment.

25. As well as consider the capital investment needs, the revenue consequences also need to be assessed. In light of the LMS regulations, the retention of a central budget for a facility benefiting certain schools has to cease. Funding can be delegated in a formula to all Primary Schools. However, there is concern that a service level agreement would have to offer the swimming service on a break-even basis to those schools which chose to use the pool, at a charging level (assessed as £138.00 per hour), which schools may not be willing or able to afford.
26. As a variation to this model it has been suggested that, once improved, the St Martin's Pool could be transferred to a community organisation, which would be responsible for its operation. Although there maybe no objections to this in principle, there is conflicting evidence from elsewhere in the County that such a change of management can overcome the economies of operating a pool.

Option B

27. The alternative option is that the St Martin's Pool is closed permanently and capital investment at the higher or lower level be made in the Leisure Pool.
28. There would be no centrally held revenue budget. Funding would be delegated to all Primary Schools, who would then 'buy' access to pools according to their needs and budget. HALO have undertaken to operate a common pricing policy for schools across all the pools that it manages. Currently the charges are £66.00 per hour.

Views of Primary Schools

29. The issues were raised as part of a budget discussion with Headteachers of Primary Schools on 24 January 2008.
30. From this meeting four Headteachers were nominated to discuss the options with the Local Authority.
31. The group of four Headteachers met with the Local Authority staff on Friday 29 February and 13 March. HALO was also present for the meeting on Friday 29 February. The Local Authority staff visited the Leisure Pool on Wednesday 5 March. The view from Primary School Headteachers expressed at a Primary Headteachers Forum on 11 March is that the St Martin's Pool should be reinstated. This view was taken without the benefit of knowing the revenue consequences, and the longer term capital costs.
32. The views of these Headteachers are now being sought, now that the revenue implications are clear. A Special Schools Forum meeting will be arranged as soon as possible and Scrutiny's views will be shared to inform their debate and subsequently the Cabinet Member will consider.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Scrutiny Committee offer a preferred option to the Cabinet Member for consideration;

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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- (a) that in light of the ongoing revenue costs of the St Martin's Pool, this pool should be decommissioned, capital investment be made at the Leisure Pool, and HALO be asked to programme pool usage to ensure sole use of the main pool by schools from September 2008 onwards. This is in line with the existing council commitment to HALO leisure arrangements; or
- (b) that works within the budget of £72,500 to re-open St Martin's Pool be undertaken, once sufficient schools committed themselves for a 3 year period at a level of charge, which would cover the net costs.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified