

# SWIMMING PROVISION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HEREFORD CITY

## PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CABINET

10 JULY 2008

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To approve the closure of the St Martin's Swimming Pool with immediate effect and the subsequent capital investment in the Hereford Leisure Pool prior to the new academic year.

### Key Decision

2. This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

It was included in the Forward Plan.

### Recommendation(s)

**THAT St Martin's Swimming Pool be closed and investment be made in the Herefordshire Leisure Pool to make it more suitable for school use.**

### Reasons

3. The financial investment required for the longer term as outlined in Table One indicates this is a clear argument for providing better value for money and the use of the Leisure Pool sustainable whilst affordable to our schools.

### Considerations

4. It is a requirement of the national curriculum that all children are able to swim 25 metres by the time they leave Primary School. In the past, 38 Primary Schools have used the pool at St Martin's, but this now requires significant capital investment in both the short and longer term to remain open.
5. The 38 Primary Schools who have used the St Martin's Pool favour its continued use as it was purposely designed to teach swimming and has dedicated school use.
6. The majority of the other Primary Schools in Herefordshire use their local swimming pool managed by Halo. The Council already invests in a partnership with Halo to provide leisure services.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Sharon Menghini, Director of Children's Services (01432) 260039

7. This paper sets out the consideration for maintaining St. Martin's Pool against the costs of using the local Leisure Pool managed by Halo.

#### St. Martin's Pool

8. There are significant capital and revenue costs required to maintain the use of St Martin's Pool by the 38 schools which are detailed below:
  - a. The St Martin's Pool requires capital investment to return it to use and to continue to maintain it in the longer term. The work to bring it back into use is estimated to cost £72,500. However, to improve the thermal performance of the building and install more energy efficient plant a further £210,000 would be needed in the medium term with further capital works likely to be required in the longer term.
  - b. The required capital investment, if the decision was made, to retain the St Martin's Pool has not been identified. There is a suggestion that it might be partially funded from Section 106 agreements resulting from housing developments in the South Wye area. Under one Section 106 agreement relating to Phase 1 of the Bradbury Lines development, £182,443 has been received from the developers and has been identified to support education projects in the locality. This figure alone would not be sufficient to meet the capital costs of bringing the St Martin's Pool up to a standard which would reduce running costs, and avoid further significant maintenance costs in the medium term. A possible further £100,000 contribution from developers has been discussed by the Planning Sub-Committee linked to the second phase, but the developers have subsequently withdrawn the application. It should be borne in mind that the £182,443 Section 106 monies can only be spent on education projects in the South Wye area. Therefore expenditure on either pool would be at the cost of projects elsewhere in this area. Other possible projects include Blackmarston Special School to provide additional care and teaching space for those children with severe disabilities.
  - c. Under the LMS rules it is possible to retain a central budget not exceeding 0.1% of the dedicated schools grant i.e. no more than £87,666. This figure may be used on any number of identified projects in support of our schools but in recent years has solely been used to support the Pool. Employee costs have reduced, so has income but all premises related costs have risen sharply. Even with this level of funding individual schools pay £66 per hour session at St Martin's Pool. This hourly charge is in line with the charges to schools in all other pools in the County managed by Halo.
  - d. The revenue cost of the St Martin's Pool each year has been subsidised by the centrally retained DSG funding. Over the last 8 years, the budget set for the Pool has had to be increased significantly beyond the level of inflation and even with these increases it is only in 2 of these 8 years that expenditure has been contained within budget, as the table below shows:-

YEAR	BUDGET	ACTUAL	VARIANCE	
07/08	78,456	112,968	-34,511	Over budget
06/07	81,885	104,454	-22,569	Over budget
05/06	50,083	70,372	-20,289	Over budget
04/05	64,519	81,811	-17,293	Over budget
03/04	48,000	21,104	+23,895	Under budget
02/03	30,000	61,486	-31,486	Over budget
01/02	42,452	35,508	+6,944	Under budget
00/01	26,711	38,702	-11,991	Over budget

- e. As requested by Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on 21 April 2008, an independent swimming pool specialist has been asked for their view. The consultant's report has been prepared on the basis of information provided by Halo and the Council. Staff costs have been modelled on Halo's terms and conditions. It evidences that revenue costs alone would increase to well over £137,000 per annum, considerably in excess of the maximum possible central budget set out above.
- f. In April 2006 revised management arrangements were agreed with Halo for the St Martin's Pool in order to best use their managerial and technical expertise on behalf of the Council. An annual fee of £12,500 was agreed, subject to annual review. By doing this, the Council has taken advantage both reducing Council staffing at the pool and of the economies of scale offered by Halo in order to purchase chemicals and equipment, co-ordinate lifeguard cover and to reduce management costs to achieve savings of approximately £20,000 per year since 2006. This cost has been met by the centrally retained £87,666. Despite these cost reductions, operating costs have continued to rise at the St Martin's pool due to increases in energy and water costs, repairs and reduced usage.
- g. Prior to the decision to commission the construction of the North Herefordshire Swimming Pool in 2005, an independent study of available water space in Herefordshire was conducted by Sport England, in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University. This study concluded that there was a shortfall of 29m<sup>2</sup> of water space in relation to the population need. The subsequent provision of the pool at Leominster led to the rectification of this deficiency and an approximately oversupply of some 335m<sup>2</sup> which equates to a 6 lane x 25m pool. Should the St Martin's Pool be decommissioned the study's methodology suggests that there is more than sufficient water space capacity to cope with the resultant loss (a net surplus of over 20m<sup>2</sup>)

#### The Hereford Leisure Pool

9. The possibility of alternative provision being made in the Leisure Pool has been explored.
10. The majority of the 38 schools are making interim use of this during the Spring and Summer Terms of 2008 (Appendix 1), but have experienced a number of difficulties.

These are listed below which can be overcome through some capital investment, good management and negotiation with Halo. These are:

- 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 for sole use of children 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.
11. Headteachers have emphasised their anxiety regarding the issue of child safety under these interim arrangements and the fact that the dimensions of the tank in the Leisure Pool are not as good as that in the St Martin's Pool for swimming tuition. No investment of capital expenditure would be able to address this problem. However, it should be noted that Halo will cease the interim arrangement of teaching children in the current pool with a beach (Leisure Pool) and transfer all schools to the main swimming pool tanks which are more appropriate for teaching swimming. Timetables for the main pool, teaching pool and leisure pool are shown at Appendix 2 together with percentage allocation by user group. This will be significantly better for all user groups including the schools.

All other schools deliver swimming instruction in their local pool and this works very well. Outside school times Halo deliver high quality swimming lessons to 1,600 children each week at Hereford Leisure Pool alone. Halo are committed to working with the Local Authority to address all of the concerns raised and are confident that this can be achieved. Halo would also wish to have regular dialogue with schools to address any issues which might arise quickly and proactively.

12. Capital investment at the Leisure Pool would be able to improve and update an internal corridor linking the changing rooms to the pools, create coach parking close to the entrance and any other minor works that are deemed appropriate.

The cost of these works has been estimated at £35,250. The Hereford Leisure Pool is in a building, which performs well in terms of energy management and is far more sustainable in this respect than the St Martin's Pool, which was completed in 1975 when such matters were of less concern. While the Leisure Pool will require planned maintenance over the next few years there is no reason why this structure and plant should not continue to provide a functional pool for the next 15 to 20 years.

13. Revenue costs to schools of using the Hereford Leisure Pool are currently £66 per session per school. Halo have submitted a proposal to the Council to standardise swimming charges at £88 per hour at all Halo managed Pools from September 2008 to

cover the loss of dedicated school usage of the Leisure Pool and to develop the swimming curriculum. If the decision is made to concentrate swimming in Hereford City at the Leisure Pool then agreement will be necessary with Halo regarding school swimming policy and operations. These increased costs could be met by delegating the £87,666 to schools which is currently retained at the centre

**Table One: Financial implications**

	<b>St Martin's pool</b> 2008 -9	St Martin's pool 2009 -10	<b>Leisure pool</b> 2008 -9	Leisure pool 2009 -10
<b>Revenue</b>				
Charge per school per hour	£66	**£66	£88	£88
Centrally held budget funded from DSG	£87,666	£87,666	Nil	Nil
Additional costs  Met by underspends in other budgets funded from DSG	£34,511	Estimated by consultant over £137,000 (separating out the initial capital investment)	Nil	Nil
<b>Capital</b>		£182,000	£160,000	£160,000
Investment funding sources to be identified and approval to be obtained	£72,500	£182,000	£160,000  To be determined	

\*\* The sessional charge for schools could be increased to cover revenue costs but these would be to a level of approx £106 per hour for schools if the central subsidy was maintained, or £208 per hour with no subsidy. The consultant's report indicates that even these price increases may not be sufficient and costs could rise further. These costs could be reduced if the charges to local swimming clubs were increased to an economic rate, estimated to be £85 per hour rather than the current £32.80 per hour. Some schools or clubs may decline to pay higher charges and this would either increase the losses or further increase charges. All price increases are based on schools usage of 856 hours in the last full year (Spring Term 2007 – Autumn Term 2007) and private club hire of 500 hours.

14. On 21 April 2008 Children's Services Scrutiny Committee resolved that the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) be recommended to consider:
  - a. That works within the budget of £72,500 to reopen the St Martin's Pool be undertaken, once sufficient schools had committed themselves for a 3 year period at a level of charge which would cover the net costs; and
  - b. A wider review of the financing of the pool be undertaken to ensure that it could operate within budget.

A letter was sent to all Primary Schools setting out 3 Options for the future. Although there were only three responses to this letter, other comments and views have been

collated by the Headteacher of St Mary's Primary School, Credenhill. The original letter and responses are printed in full in Appendix 3.

15. The South Wye Partnership has considered the possibility of a 'Quirk Transfer' but does not want to pursue this option. Hereford Swimming Club has also felt that they could not take any responsibility of the Pool even though they would like to see it continue to operate.
16. Schools Forum budget working group have been consulted on their willingness to support the retention of the £87,666 centrally retained element of funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant. They recommended that the budget and subsidy be delegated to schools and on financial grounds that the St Martin's Pool be closed.

## **Financial Implications**

The financial implications of the recommendation are summarised in the Table One and clearly evidence that the better longer term financial investment is to refurbish the Leisure Pool and close St Martin's Pool.

## **Risk Management**

From a service viewpoint, it is important to ensure children can access water facilities which allow them to learn to swim and meet National Curriculum requirements. The interim arrangements are unsatisfactory and a decision on the way forward is required urgently to inform the arrangements for a new academic year.

On the financial side and in asset management terms, the more sustainable position in the longer term is to invest in the Leisure Pool.

## **Alternative Options**

The two options of either investing in the Leisure Pool or the St Martin's Pool are set out in the report. A further variation which has been raised is the transfer of the St Martin's Pool to another body by quirk agreement but this would be unlikely to be successful until after the Council has made significant capital investment to return it to a suitable state for use. This would not overcome the inherent high cost in operating that pool and the consequent costs to schools.

## **Consultees**

Schools

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Schools Use of Swimming Pools in Hereford City in 2007/08

Appendix 2 Timetables for Hereford Leisure Pool by user group: current and proposed with percentages

Appendix 3 Letter to Primary Schools and Responses

## **Background Papers**

None identified