

Appendix 1

Sport Wales

Welsh Government Free Swimming Initiative (FSI) – a new approach

Background

Following the Independent Review of Free Swimming (Free Swimming in Wales: A Review, published by UK Research and Consultancy Services, July 2018) and the subsequent Service Re-Design Report (Free Swimming Programme Service Redesign, published by UKRCS December 2018) Sport Wales have been working with partners to make recommendation to The Welsh Government on the future of Free Swimming.

The overall conclusion of the Independent Review of the Free-Swimming program is that there are now increasing misalignments within it between its objectives, the grant conditions, and the management arrangements. The current approach is not cost-effective, nor does it make the biggest contribution to increasing levels of activity. To highlight the extent of the current performance:

The number of young people benefiting from the scheme is in significant decline and this has been the case since 2013-14. For the 60 plus age group, the Review estimated that only 6% of the target population currently access the programme.

The Review concludes that this decline is not a result of the declining popularity of swimming but is due to a significant reduction in the availability of free swimming sessions – due to increased pressure of local authority mainstream leisure budgets, changes in the free swimming minimum criteria, a shift in emphasis towards free swimming for older people, and reductions in the overall funding and changes to the funding formula.

Against this backdrop, supported by the additional work undertaken with delivery partners post-Review, it is clear that the current scheme needs fundamental change and if it were to continue with the exiting level of investment it would not be offering value for money for the public purse.

In May 2019, following discussions between Sport Wales and The Welsh Government, agreement has been reached in terms of purpose and targeting of a revised Free-Swimming Initiative.

New Delivery Model

The revised delivery model maintains the manifesto commitment to Free Swimming although it will be delivered in a more targeted way and provide flexibility to better meet the needs of local communities. The scheme will continue to provide opportunities for all young people under 16-years of age and every person aged over 60, who wishes to access free swimming. The priority will be to ensure young people from deprived communities have access to “free splash” sessions during summer holidays and weekends, at times most suitable to their needs. The opportunity will vary based on the model applied by the Local Authority, but all models will align with the objectives set out and the new performance measures highlighted below. All models will provide a minimum offer for both U16 and Over 60 swimming this will be set by local need and intelligence on demand.

A minimum criteria will not be set as a mandate for all LAs but there is a clear expectation from Sport Wales that for U16 this will be at least one free splash session on weekends in each of the

pools and at least 2 additional sessions per week in addition to the weekend offer during the summer holidays.

Sport Wales will also expect the balance between the providing for U16 and Over 60s to be addressed with clear prioritisation of provision being given to u16's. Sport Wales will expect there to be free provision for over 60's but this may be alongside a subsidised offer for those who wish to access the scheme on a more frequent or regular basis.

FSI Objective: To improve people's health and wellbeing by increasing the number of people enjoying swimming or aquatic related activities, with the priority target group being young people aged under 16 years from deprived communities.

Future delivery should be set in the context of the Vision for Sport in Wales, Prosperity for All and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. In particular,

- **Positive Action** - Priority to be given to those who wish to take part in swimming but face barriers to being active on a regular basis. The main beneficiaries will be young people from deprived communities who will have access to "free splash" sessions during summer holidays and weekends, at times most suitable to their needs.
- **Life Skill** - Promote swimming as a life skill through targeted support for young people 16 years and under.
- **Active Lifestyles** - Improve mental and physical health by enabling young people (16 years and under) and older adults (60+) to lead active lifestyles through swimming.

The new FSI will no longer solely measure pool access but will now focus on actual usage, targeted interventions and report against wider wellbeing outcomes. Improving health and wellbeing such as enjoyment, mental wellbeing and social benefits would be regarded as key performance measures, for the scheme and will be reported alongside usage numbers. It should be noted that as a result of implementing these wider impact measurements, it will not be appropriate to compare on a like-for-like basis with the previous FSI. The access for young people to "free splash" sessions during summer holidays and weekends will be closely monitored as part of the plans submitted by local authorities.

Proposed Budget

In addition to the new focus, a revised budget for FSI of £1.5m per annum has been agreed (previously £3m). Local Authorities are requested to submit an 18-month plan that sets out their local approach from October 2019. As part of managing the changes we recognise there is a need to establish a transition period with flexibility in how available budgets are deployed locally. We have allocated additional, transitional funding this year to support the changes and this is set out in the table below,

Financial Year	Budget	Notes
2019-20 Apr – Sept 2019	£1.5m	Full revenue funding to deliver under existing FSI criteria through to 30 September 2019. Flexibility to deploy some of this budget as part of the 18-month plan being implemented from 1 October 2019.

Oct 2019-March 2020	£0.75m £1m Total = £3.25m	Revenue funding to support the 18-month plan being implemented from 1 October 2019. Transitional funding: minor capital works funding to support the 18-month plan being implemented from 1 October 2019.
2020-21	£1.5m	Revenue funding to support the 18-month plan being implemented from 1 October 2019.

Budget Modelling

The Independent Review confirmed that in 2016/17 there was 145,000 free splash sessions for young people at an average cost of £2.30 per swim – a total annual cost of £333,500.

Future Scenario: The annual budget of £1,500,000 is split 60:40 (young people: over 60s)

Young people budget = £900,000. Assuming £220,000 supports structured / learn to swim activities (based on an average of £10,000 per LA), this would leave a budget of £680,000 for free splash sessions during summer holidays and weekends.

Management of the Scheme

2019-20 would be a transition into a new way of working and would encourage Local Authorities to trial a new approach where learning would take place to help shape future work. A steering group made up of representatives across the sector would be responsible for providing future direction and scrutiny to the development of the programme.

The new delivery model refocuses FSI and gives much greater clarity on purpose and expected outcomes. This will allow Sport Wales to adopt a much stronger approach to performance management and add the withdrawal of funding to its repertoire of potential sanctions.

Conclusions

The future delivery model of FSI needs to be seen and promoted through a different mindset by funders, managers, deliverers and users by highlighting the benefits of change. The key message must be about positive change that builds off the successful aspects of the current FSI whilst proactively addressing the findings of the Review. The changes bring about new and exciting opportunities to be active through swimming whilst maintaining the manifesto commitment to free swimming.