

Lancaster City Council

1. Introduction

Lancaster City Council has signalled the intention to cease operating three community swimming pools currently leased from the County Council. The purpose of this short note is to identify the steps taken by the County Council that will enable the City Council to keep these facilities open and also provide additional funding for other community/cultural facilities.

2. Background

The County Council has a number of schools with on-site swimming pools. Swimming pools on school sites are either wholly owned and operated by the school or leased to and operated by the District Council with usage by the school being the subject of a dual use agreement. The only exceptions to this are the 3 pools in the Lancaster District where under the terms of the lease, the County Council has retained a landlord responsibility for the buildings.

Swimming provision for pupils in schools is a curriculum requirement; schools must ensure all children can swim unaided over a distance of at least 25 metres. It is not a legal duty placed directly on the local authority nor is it a duty for the local authority to own and operate swimming pools to enable schools to meet this requirement.

3. The Problem

Lancaster City Council faces significant budgetary challenges. Consequently, the Cabinet has determined it wishes to cease providing community swimming at Carnforth, Heysham & Hornby. The facilities are well used by the communities in question with over 100,000 customers in 2008/9. The saving to the City Council is estimated at c£135k.

The pools in question are currently leased from the County Council and the City Council need to serve 12 months notice to quit. Whilst the Cabinet decision is likely to be "called in" it is anticipated that the notice to quit will be served shortly thereafter.

It is important to note that the swimming pools are part of a larger financial problem facing the City Council as they also fund a number of other cultural/community facilities including the Dome and the Dukes Theatre. Indeed, the City Council has acknowledged a funding shortfall of around £300k for a range of facilities.

4. Solution

The provision of these facilities is a City Council decision.

Whilst there are curricular responsibilities for school swimming, these do not stretch to the provision of dedicated pools as schools educational responsibilities can be met in any swimming facilities including private pools. In addition, the County Council is under no obligation to fund community facilities in Lancaster. Choosing to do so would create a hugely expensive precedent across the rest of the county.

However, the County Council realises the importance of providing community/leisure facilities whilst at the same time recognising the increasing financial burden they place on district councils.

Consequently, the Chief Executive and Executive Director of Resources met with the Chief Executive of the City Council to consider how the two organisations can work together to deal with the challenge.

It has been agreed that shared services and other joint working opportunities should be pursued to achieve a £300k benefit for the City Council. This would enable the City Council to maintain the community swimming facilities and provide funding for other cultural/community facilities. Initial targets for joint working include

- The City Council providing "front of house" customer contact facilities in existing One-Stop Shops for county council services. The County Council would reimburse the City Council for this work;
- The County Council will look to integrate telephone answering/resolution into the Customer Service Centre which will generate cost savings to the City Council;
- The City Council will provide the County Council with accommodation. This will fit with the County Council's accommodation strategy and rent will be paid to the City Council rather than a third party as the County Council has no appropriate property in the north of the County
- Shared services in other back office/support functions. Potential opportunities include HR & Payroll, Legal Services, Property Management, ICT etc

5. Next Steps

Work will commence immediately. The Chief Executive will personally lead the City Council's input and the Executive Director for Resources will be responsible for the County Council.