

Equality Impact Assessment: Pool in the Park proposed increase of fees and charges (as a temporary measure)

Officer responsible for completing EIA: Head of Leisure and Communities	Manager responsible for EIA: Head of Leisure and Communities
Director responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm	Date updated: 22 January 2024

1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information. This Equality Impact Assessment seeks to identify the impacts and effects on specific groups from this proposal, and to detail any mitigating actions that will be put into place.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to 'live within its means' in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the Council's [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

The pool has required a subsidy from the council of circa £450,000 to run during the financial year 2023 to 2024. This does not include any capital depreciation or the financing of the loans on improvements done historically. Nor does it allow sufficient funds for future "major" repairs or replacement. Working with the community groups a new charging structure is being proposed for 24/25 that generates an additional £500,000 per annum. The surpluses from this operating budget will then go towards the ongoing repairs and maintenance fund, preparing us for larger jobs that we know are needed in the future.

A phased closure of 3 years was the original proposal being consulted on. (A separate EqIA was prepared for this.)

Results from the phase 2 consultation indicated that 57% of respondents wanted the Council to investigate price increases to cover the shortfall. This EqIA looks at the impact of price increases as a temporary measure to keep the Pool in the Park open, to maintain the service and keep all activities. Although raising fees and charges will have some negative equality impacts, it will have less than if the Pool facility closed completely.

2. Impact on services

Woking Borough Council owns Pool in the Park, which is situated in Woking Park. The venue comprises of three pools, the main competition pool, a teaching pool and the leisure lagoon. The pool is operated by a charitable partner Freedom Leisure and has 350,000 to 400,000 visitors per year. Of these visitors there are a number of specialist groups offering specific services to key groups of residents and a number of professional sports clubs who utilise the pool as their “home”. Six local schools also use the pool for their regular swimming lessons. The pool operates from 6am until 10pm Monday to Friday and from 7am until 8pm at weekends. The pool employs over 100 staff on a range of full time and part time contracts.

The proposed price increase will mean that all the sessions will be able to be continued. Benchmarking has been carried out with other providers and a business case has been developed. The impact of the price increases on usage and any specific impact on the groups below will need to be monitored closely.

3. Engagement and consultation

Resident engagement took place in the summer of 2023. [Read the summer consultation report.](#)

Further consultation took place in the autumn from 2 October to 12 November. [Read the autumn consultation report.](#)

- 47% of all respondents participated in the Pool in the Park Survey and nine groups responded to the stakeholder survey.
- 80% of the respondents stated that closing pool in the park would have either a major or moderate impact on them.

A number of the responses are from stakeholder groups who have highlighted that if the pool was to be closed the activities that they participate in will end. The scuba club for example does not have another suitable venue locally it could move to and as such it would have no choice but to close. A number of schools local to Pool in the Park use the facility to meet its educational requirement to ensure all children can swim 25 meters before leaving primary school. Without Pool in the Park it will not be possible to achieve this as there are no other local venues with available space.

To achieve substantial savings in the running of Pool in the Park, respondents responded as follows:

- The majority 57% of respondents said to investigate price increases.
- 35% said look into other ways of finding savings.
- 5% want the complex closed all at the same time.
- 3% agreeing with a phased closure.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	<p>What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action)</p> <p>This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts.</p>
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men					x	<p>All sessions will remain the same, but there will be an increase in price.</p> <p>Impact on number of attendees will need to be monitored.</p>
	Women					x	<p>The ladies only session will continue. The impact on numbers attending will need to be monitored.</p>
Gender reassignment						x	<p>Statistics are not collected on the number of people who have reassigned their gender, however the impact will be the same as above.</p>
Race	White					x	<p>All groups in this section will be affected by the price increase as above. Currently no information is collected on the race of users. This will need to be done to better understand who is using the facilities.</p>
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					x	<p>As above</p>
	Asian/Asian British					x	<p>As above</p>
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British					x	<p>As above</p>
	Gypsies / travellers					x	<p>As above</p>
	Other ethnic group					x	<p>As above</p>
Disability	Physical				x		<p>All concessions will remain, but the prices will increase. There is also a proposal to reduce the number of hours for disability swimming sessions from 4.5 per week to 3 hrs.</p> <p>Mitigation: The impact of the price increase and reduction in sessions will need to be monitored.</p>
	Sensory				x		<p>As above</p>

	Learning Difficulties				x		As above
	Mental Health				x		As above

Sexual orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	The impact will be the same as for all other groups, with no specific impact on this group.
Age	Older people (50+)					x	Age statistics for users of the venue are not captured. Prices for the concessions for older people will increase. The impact of increases in concessionary process will need to be monitored as part of the review of the mitigation.
	Children (0-15)					x	Pool in the Park offers over 2,000 swimming lessons to children per week as well as offering a range of pre and post natal sessions. These sessions will all continue but the impact of the price increase will need to be monitored.
Religion or belief	Faith Groups					x	Pool in the Park offers gender specific groups which allows access to those of certain faiths who cannot swim with the other gender. These sessions will continue. The impact of the price increases will need to be monitored.
Pregnancy and maternity						x	All aquanatal sessions will continue. The impact of price increases will need to be monitored.
Marriage and civil partnership						x	There is no specific impact on this group.
Socio-economic background					x		30% of the facility users access the concessions package (90 – 120,000 visitors) The impact of price increases on those accessing concessions will need to be monitored as part of the review period.
Carers						x	Carers will continue to get free access.
Other identified groups	Looked after children					X	There is no specific impact on this group.

Action plan

Actions identified from EqlA	Target completion date	Responsible officer	Comments
Put forward a proposal for changes and increases to the charging structure to cover the shortfall.	8 February 2024.	Head of Leisure and Communities	Working with the community groups - a new charging structure is being proposed that generates an additional £500k per annum
Price increases to be implemented from 1/4/24.	1 April 2024	Head of Leisure and Communities	
Better understanding the make-up of users of the pool so impact on specific groups can be ascertained.	This will take place during the 6 months from 1 April 2024 through to 30 September 2024	Head of Leisure and Communities	
Review impact of changes in charging and price increases, including completing an EqlA outlining specific impact on the groups above and those on concessions rates.	A report will be generated following 6 months of trialling this increase	Head of Leisure and Communities	
Explore options for long-term future of the Pool.	By November 2025	Head of Leisure and Communities	
Identify and signpost to alternative provisions in borough/out of borough	Complete and very limited	Head of Leisure and Communities	Swim Tuition in particular is very limited due to the high demand in the industry being greater than the availability. Casual or fitness swimming does have other opportunities both at Eastwood, but also at neighbouring boroughs.

Signoff

LEGAL SERVICES: Completed	DATE: 8 January 2024
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: Completed	DATE: 22 January 2024
REVIEW PANEL MEMBER: Completed	DATE: 4 January 2024