

Government Fund to Support Public Swimming Pools (report from Peter Gilpin & Charlie Plowden)

As part of the Spring Budget the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, announced a £63million support fund for public swimming pools. It will be distributed by Sport England.

Whilst full details have yet to be announced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Charlie Plowden, Assistant Director – Countryside & Leisure attended a South West Councils Leisure Providers meeting on 21st March that had the leisure lead from the LGA to provide initial understandings of the new funding. Peter Gilpin (CEO, LED Leisure) also attended a Community Leisure UK meeting on the 31st March at which Emma Bernstein (Sport England Director) explained how she anticipates the eligibility criteria will be determined, and the funding will be distributed, following initial discussions with the DCMS.

Although the DCMS had yet to sign off the business case and application and assessment process, the following are likely to be the key criteria:

- The fund consists of £23m for revenue support and £40m for decarbonisation of public swimming pools (capital projects).
- Applications must be made by local authorities and outsourced arrangements with leisure trusts (such as LED) are eligible. Funding will not be available for private sector operators.
- The £23m of revenue support will not stretch far between the 800+ eligible public pools so will be targeted towards those in areas of social deprivation; it will not be evenly distributed.
- There will be an application process for the £23m that will likely be based upon the Moving Communities data and criteria that applied to the National Leisure Recovery Fund during the pandemic, which means that EDDC's pools are unlikely to be in the highest priority group.
- The timescale for funding applications for the £23m revenue funding is likely to be mid-May and to be claimed in 2023-24 financial year.
- The £40m fund for decarbonisation capital projects is likely to open in July, and be awarded over a 2-year period, as the nature of these projects will require a longer proposal and delivery timescale. Even so, there is concern in the public leisure sector that the low-carbon energy industry will not be able to cope with the demand and this relatively short-term timescale.

Conclusion: In the light of the preceding reports on the 'energy options' available to the Council's 3 swimming pools (agenda items 10 and 11) that EDDC officers commission an external consultant's review of the options, with a view to determining any short-term decarbonisation solutions that may be eligible and applicable for the forthcoming capital funding opportunity in July.

Further, that the consultants help determine a longer-term energy strategy for the 3 pools that considers the current heating arrangements and lifecycle of boilers, etc, with a view to achieving the most carbon-neutral and cost-effective solution within the Council's carbon-neutral timescale (including offsetting).

Flamingo Pool could be included within the above review(s) and be supported with advice and any application to the Swimming Pool Support Fund on the basis that the Flamingo Pool Charity cover their own resulting costs through their own funds or additional grants.

Property Services have an approved budget towards consultancy costs in 2023-24 which will be required to help EDDC develop its energy strategy for the swimming pools, which represent a significant proportion of both the Council's energy costs (through LED) and carbon footprint.