

Scrutiny Committee	Scrutiny Committee - Communities
Date of meeting:	9 July, 2013
Title of item	Background to Welsh Government Free Swim Initiative.
Author	Elwyn Jones, Sport Development Manager
Purpose	Respond to points raised by committee members

1. Background

The Welsh government has invested in an initiative to fund free swimming sessions throughout Wales for the last 10 years.

This grant is used in Gwynedd to fund the following minimum swimming sessions throughout the county:

- 7 hours of free swimming every week for 16 year old and younger during school holidays.
- 7 hours of aquatic activities every week for 16 year old and younger during school holidays.
- 1 structured session for children with disabilities every week.
- 2 hours of free swimming every week for 16 year old and younger during weekends throughout the year.
- Sessions for over 60 throughout the year.

In Gwynedd, every public pool takes part in the initiative including Harlech Swimming Pool which has been excluded from council management since 2009. In those pools, Gwynedd offers a more extensive provision than the minimum requirement with every pool offering the above as a minimum.

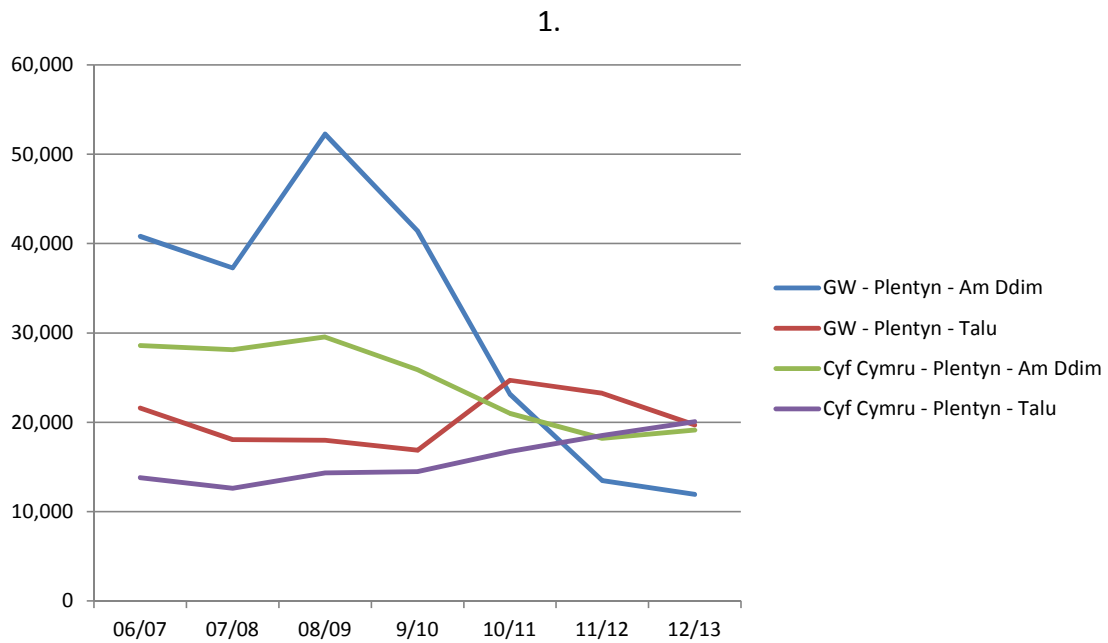
The Council receives a grant of £149,441 yearly to provide this initiative.

2. Gwynedd's Performance Trends

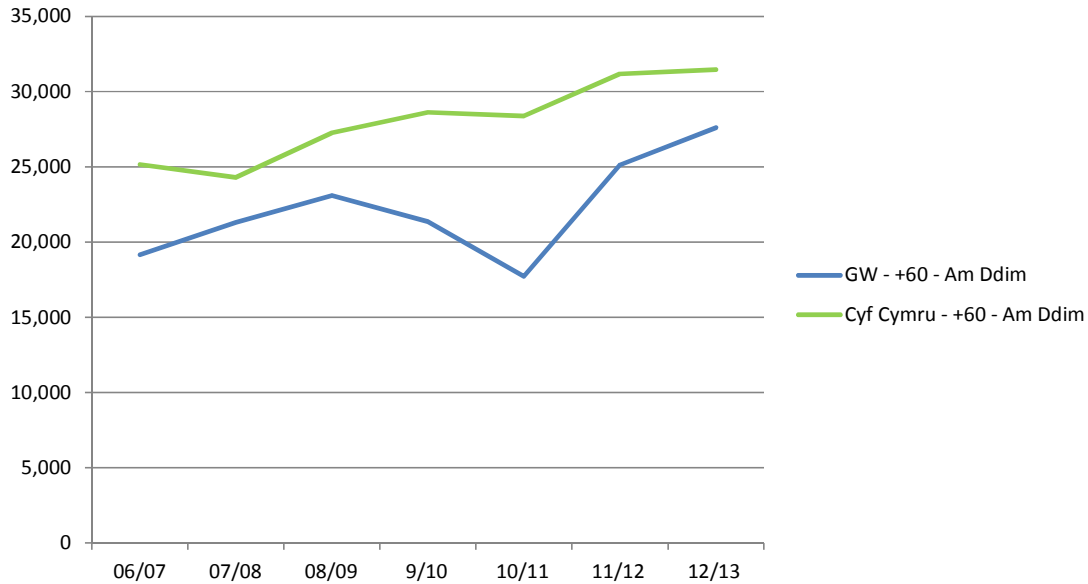
Gwynedd's performance has varied dependant on the age groups e.g. the performance for 16 year olds and younger has been consistently higher than the Wales average up until 2011/12 and consistently lower than the Wales average for 60 year olds and above.

The following graphs illustrate the point

Graph 1: Free swim – 16 year old and younger.



Graph 2: free swim – adults 60 and over



The changes in performance have been consistent with some local decisions that have been implemented recently in relation to the grant's use. These include:

- There has been an increase in focus on structured aquatic sessions rather than open swimming. This has led to a significant decrease in the number of children attending free swimming sessions.
- The council charge a fee of £1.00 for structured sessions which means that the numbers cannot be included in the free swim data. Contrary to expectation, the numbers attending these sessions have increased since the fee was introduced.
- There has been a decrease in the number of sessions offered over the years because of the increase in swimming fees and the comparable decrease in the value of a free swim session from the point of view of income for the pool.
- An increase in provision and a successful marketing campaign has led to an increase in the numbers of older – over 60 swimmers.

3. Free access to parents of children under 8.

- The access to swimming pools policy operated by the Gwynedd pools notes that children under the age of 8 need to be supervised by a parent or guardian in order to enter a pool. This meant, and to increase usage of the free swim initiative, that in 2003 parents and guardians were allowed free access with the council shouldering the cost.

- However, as part of the efficiency package quantum £16m in 2009, the council decided to change this arrangement in order to increase swimming pools income. However, this new arrangement was not introduced until 2012 with the service shouldering the cost for a further 3 years.

4. Outline of core programme for 2013 – 2014.

During the school holidays in Summer 2013, the 7 Gwynedd pools will be offering:

- 1 hour of free swimming every day
- 1 hour of free structured session every week.
- 4 pools will be offering free swimming on weekends
- 3 pools will be offering structured sessions for children with disabilities.

5. Further plans.

In addition to the above programme, the service will also be using some of the grant money to secure the best effect possible on Gwynedd children's swimming abilities by:

- Monitoring the quality of both paid and free swimming lessons provided by the council.
- Targetting children in deprived areas of Gwynedd with more free swimming lessons.
- Offering 3 community galas for the children of Gwynedd to experience swimming in a competitive environment and be part of local swimming clubs.
- Improve the knowledge about the availability of the free swim initiative throughout Gwynedd.