

We would like to draw your attention to an invaluable window of opportunity which has presented itself as it is paramount that we take advantage of this while it is available.

B&NES Council is currently in discussion with a number of large leisure organisations with a view to awarding a contract to run the B&NES Leisure facilities for the next 30 years, a contract which will include rebuilding the Keynsham Leisure Centre as well as remodelling or redeveloping Bath and other B&NES leisure facilities. This is a golden opportunity to ensure that warm water pools with fully accessible changing facilities that truly meet the needs of disabled children & young people are included in these development plans.

While we realise that leisure facilities is not an area that is your direct responsibility, this is an issue which has enormous relevance to you with your responsibility for disabled children & young people.

Currently there is extremely limited provision for children & young people who need fully accessible warm water pools to go swimming. With such pools in local leisure centres, disabled children who have learnt to swim in special schools or at specialised swimming lessons would be able to go swimming regularly with family & friends in an inclusive recreational environment, which would help them to remain fit & active and maintain a healthy body weight. Young people who benefit from hydrotherapy and swimming while they are at special schools such as Three Ways & Fosseyway will be able to continue exercising and swimming on a regular basis and maintain the benefits after they leave school.

In your Children & Young People's Plan 2014-17, your Outcome of 'Children & Young People are Healthy' includes reference to your objectives of young people achieving a healthy body weight and of increased participation in physical activity & sport. For more severely disabled children and young people whose exercise opportunities may be limited, being able to access a suitable swimming pool is absolutely vital for them to be able to do this

In your Plan, you also show how this Outcome, along with 'Children & Young People are Safe', align closely with the themes in the BANES Health & Wellbeing Strategy of 'Helping People to stay healthy' which includes helping children to maintain a healthy weight and creating healthy & sustainable places, and 'Improving the quality of people's lives' which includes improved support for people with long term health conditions.

You are going to hear from some of the children and young people themselves. They are looking for your support to ensure that any contract for new & redeveloped leisure facilities includes

- warm water pools with water at 32°C which are accessible for them and suitable for their needs both now & when they are older (ie deep enough & large enough for them to be able to swim).
- Furthermore that they will have changing facilities with hoists & changing beds so they are suitable for everyone whatever their level of disability and finally
- that they will be available for them to use on a regular basis and at an affordable price

Only then will they be able to participate in exercise and swimming on an equal basis to their able-bodied peers.

Susan Charles

Chair Warm Water Inclusive Swimming & Exercise (WWISE) Network