

*HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT*  
*LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION*



**Nick Goulder**  
Director

**Councillor Melville Kendal**  
Chairman

**Civic Offices**  
**Leigh Road**  
**Eastleigh**  
**SO50 9YN**

*Tel:* 023 8068 8431 *Fax:* 023 8068 8030  
*E-Mail:* [hiow@eastleigh.gov.uk](mailto:hiow@eastleigh.gov.uk)  
*Website:* [www.hiow.gov.uk/](http://www.hiow.gov.uk/)  
*Britdoc:* DX 122381 EASTLEIGH 2  
*Hampshire Courier:* C404

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15 September 2008

Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
LONDON  
SW1Y 5DH

Copy to Paul Bolt, Director, Sport and Leisure, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Secretary of State

**Free Swimming Programme**

This Association represents all 15 local authorities in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight together with the Fire and Rescue Authority, Police Authority, New Forest National Park Authority and Town and Parish Council Associations.

We welcome the Government's commitment to sport and swimming in particular. We are keen to implement any national scheme which offers free swimming to those aged 60 and over/16 and under. We approve of the idea of trying the scheme out and reviewing its impact and cost in the light of experience.

However we note with dismay that the Government does not intend to meet 100% of the cost of the scheme. This means that a significant cost – we estimate up to 60% for some authorities i.e. much more than your original aim of up to 25% - will fall on the Council Tax payer.

Many Councils will have to subsidise residents of other Council areas using swimming pools across Council boundaries.

It is unreasonable to place any part of the burden of this national free swimming scheme on the Council Tax.

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The Council Tax represents only around 20% of local authorities' income base. It is under tremendous pressure not only from Government initiatives such as concessionary bus travel, but also from demographic changes, inflation and other pressures including year-on-year Government grant reductions. Council Tax is particularly sensitive to cost increases, and in any case could be capped by the Government. If the Council Tax subsidy remains for the trial period, we ask that the capping limit be increased to reflect the additional cost of this scheme.

We urge the Government to think again and ensure full funding for the experimental two years of the scheme. Meanwhile many of our authorities will make propositions to implement the scheme in the hope that you will address this issue.

If the Government does not address this matter successfully it must be accepted that authorities are only taking part now on a trial basis. Continuation beyond the first two years depends on future Government funding.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melville Kendal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Melville Kendal  
CHAIRMAN