

COMMUNITY SPORTS COMMITTEE

Public Swimming Pool Monthly Ticket Scheme

Purpose

This paper outlines a proposal for the introduction of a public swimming pool monthly ticket.

Background

2. Swimming is one of the most popular sports in Hong Kong. In 2011, attendance at the 41 public swimming pools under the management of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) exceeded 9.5 million. In recent years, members of the public, District Councils (DCs) and political parties have requested the introduction of a public swimming pool monthly ticket to relieve the financial burden of regular swimmers, especially elderly swimmers, and to promote participation in sport.

3. In his 2011-12 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the introduction of a public swimming pool monthly ticket scheme to ease the burden on frequent elderly swimmers and to promote swimming among the general public. We are now working on the detailed arrangements for the issue of the monthly ticket, with a view to introducing it in summer 2012.

The Proposed Monthly Ticket Scheme

Purpose and Target Groups

4. Through the scheme we aim to make regular swimming more affordable, particularly for the elderly, to promote the sport in the community and to encourage members of the public to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

5. Swimming pool monthly tickets will be available to all members of the public. Adults aged 60 or above, people with disabilities and their minders, children aged between 3 and 13, and full-time students – all of whom currently enjoy concessionary rates for entry to swimming pools – will be able to purchase the monthly tickets at half price.

Scope

6. Holders of monthly tickets will be able to access all pools under LCSD management except for the Wan Chai Swimming Pool, which is designated for group training. Ticket holders will be entitled to unlimited use of swimming pool facilities within one month from the effective date of the ticket, when pools are open for public use (normally three sessions a day).

Pricing

7. In setting an appropriate price for the swimming pool monthly ticket, we need to consider the following factors –

(a) Affordability

Currently, an adult aged below 60 who swims once every day at a public swimming pool pays between \$530 and \$570 a month. Many frequent patrons of public swimming pools are elderly people, who enjoy concessionary rates and would therefore pay about half this amount for swimming once every day. As one of the aims of introducing a monthly ticket is to ease the financial burden on regular swimmers, the price of the ticket should offer a significant discount to the current cost of regular swimming.

(b) Encouraging more regular public participation in swimming

Another main aim of introducing the monthly ticket is to promote swimming among members of the public, which is in line with our policy objective of promoting sport for all. We therefore need to set the price of the monthly ticket at a level that will not only benefit regular swimmers, but also encourage those who currently swim less frequently to purchase the monthly tickets and swim more often.

(c) Impact on the operation of swimming pools

With the introduction of the monthly ticket, swimming will become more affordable for many people, and we therefore expect attendance at public swimming pools to increase. At present, it is rare for public swimming pools to reach their maximum capacity for attendance, and we envisage that pools should have sufficient capacity to accommodate the increased attendance arising from the introduction of the monthly ticket. With more new and upgraded swimming pools coming into operation in Eastern District, Tuen Mun, Kwun Tong, Lam Tin, and Lai Chi Kok in the coming one to two years, the introduction of the scheme would unlikely cause a significant impact on the operation of public swimming pools.

(d) Price of monthly tickets offered by non-public swimming pools

We have made reference to the price levels set by sports organisations for monthly swimming pool tickets, which range between \$395 and \$520. We would wish to pitch the price of the public swimming pool monthly ticket at a more affordable level.

Taking account of the above considerations, our initial view is that a price level of about \$350 for the monthly ticket (with a concessionary rate of \$175) would be appropriate to meet the aims of introducing the ticket. However, in the light of the views expressed by the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs and District Council (DC) representatives (see paragraphs 8 and 9 below), we are reviewing the viability of introducing the ticket at a lower price, taking into account factors such as the potential impact of a lower price level on the utilisation of swimming pools and its effect on promoting regular swimming, as well as cost recovery and subsidy rates.

Consultation with Legislative Council and District Councils

8. Given the DCs' role in advising LCSD on the management of district leisure facilities, we consulted the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of the DCs on the proposed monthly ticket scheme on 19 January 2012. They welcomed the proposed scheme and requested its early implementation. Nonetheless, the majority of the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen at the meeting considered that a price level of \$350 (\$175) would be too high to relieve effectively the burden of people in lower income groups who are keen swimmers. They therefore asked that we consider lowering the proposed price to \$300 (\$150). Some DC Chairmen and Vice-chairmen were concerned about possible over-crowding of pools during peak days and suggested that we also introduce a non-peak monthly ticket so as to encourage swimmers to swim on non-peak days.

9. We also consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs on the scheme on 10 February 2012. Members at the meeting passed a motion requesting the Government to expedite the introduction of the scheme, with the ticket price set at not more than \$300 a month.

10. As noted in paragraph 7 above, we are examining the suggestion made by the Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs, and DC Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen that the price of the ticket should not exceed \$300 (\$150). We aim to come to a view in April before tabling the relevant subsidiary legislation. On the suggestion for introducing a non-peak monthly ticket, there would be a number of logistical issues to be addressed when managing two types of monthly ticket with different validity periods. We also need to ascertain the actual impact of the scheme on the utilisation and operation of swimming pools. Nonetheless, we will study this suggestion and assess its viability after the implementation of the monthly ticket scheme.

Legislative Timetable

11. The setting of fees and charges for public swimming pools is governed by the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). Pursuant to Section 124J(1) of the Ordinance, we plan to introduce a regulation to prescribe the price levels for swimming pool monthly tickets and to make the tickets available in early July 2012, before the peak swimming season.

Publicity

12. LCSD plans to promote the monthly ticket scheme by –

- (a) issuing press releases introducing the scheme;
- (b) providing information on the scheme on its website; and
- (c) putting up posters and banners at the District Leisure Services Offices, swimming pools and major LCSD venues.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to note and comment on the proposed monthly ticket scheme for public swimming pools.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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