



Club Chairman
Gateshead and Whickham ASC

All Parents, Carers and Swimmers
Gateshead and Whickham ASC

04 May 2015

It's five weeks since I last wrote to explain the situation that we're in with regard to the pool time that was going to be made available to us and the financial price that we would have to pay to achieve it. Whilst we fully expected that an increase in cost was imminent, we certainly didn't expect the level that it actually is. We therefore have spent this interim period working to reduce the cost that we would have to pass on to the swimming membership.

At first our negotiations with Gateshead Council seemed to be positive, with some of our proposals taken away for consideration. Unfortunately, suggestions such as looking to share sessions with the public and providing our own lifeguards are deemed to be unacceptable by the Council. Likewise, except for the opportunity to take up one early evening session at Blaydon Leisure Centre, they have refused to move on the pools and sessions available to us, or the level of price increase levied.

The facts:

- The increase in cost lies between 82% and 154% per hour depending upon the day of the week and the time of day.
- GMBC believe that following the 2014-15 consultation, the public require their pools to be available to them between 7am and 7pm, therefore restricting club access.
- The 2014-15 consultation did NOT consider club swimming and focussed entirely upon public access, although some pools are sparsely used during the sessions we requested.
- Swimming with a similar schedule as we do now - at the new prices - will result in running costs which require fees to be almost doubled – our hire costs for training is forecast to rise from £4.5k to £9k per month.

The Club's committee have made a commitment in the short term to operate at the same level as we are now, targeting greater swimmer participation at national level. However, we must make the club sustainable and cannot allow ourselves to move into a negative financial situation.

We have calculated that to meet the additional running costs, the Club's fees would need to be increased by at least 50%. The Committee appreciate that a rise of this magnitude is likely to be too expensive for some to pay and therefore we have approved the following plan.

The plan:

- A revised training schedule has been prepared - which will be published very soon – which we believe is the best that can be achieved with the increased charges and pool availability. This schedule includes a small reduction in training time for each of the Club's squads.
- The Annual membership for all swimmers will increase from £25 to £35. This will remain payable in August of each year.
- Monthly swimming fees will increase on 1st June 2015 by around 25% to:

A Squad	£80
YSP	£45
B Squad	£63
C2B Squad	£45
C+ Squad	£40
C Squad	£34
Learners	£20

- For the next six months we will be drawing down around £1600 per month from the Club's limited reserve. Our financial reserve is finite. At the above rate, this will be fully consumed by the end of 2015.
- If we do not come up with ways of reducing our outgoings, or increasing revenue then it is likely that a further similar fee increase will be required at the turn of the year.
- Meetings with squad parents and carers will be arranged imminently.

Between now and the end of the year, we will consider all options and opportunities to continue operations at the current level. These include the possibility of training at alternative venues.

Increases in fees are never pleasant but generally inevitable, but the amount that the Council have decided is necessary is crippling for us in the long term. It is simply unaffordable. In this financial climate, many of us will have some decisions to make, I ask you all to make them from an informed position. Central Government funding to local authorities is dropping and is likely to be negligible by 2020. All local authorities are looking to income generation moving forward and I expect that most swimming clubs will be facing similar situations sooner or later. We have to convince Gateshead that this is not the best place to be looking.

Now is also the time to speak to, email or even doorstep your councillors, MPs and any other persons of interest.

I have written to Councillor Peter Mole, Member with portfolio responsibility for Sport and Physical Activity and to all other Gateshead Councillors and Members of Parliament. If you don't already know, or haven't already done so, you can find your local councillor's contact details at this link <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/Councillors/FindCouncillor.aspx> I'm certain they will be really eager to hear how this will affect you and your children.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Strickland, Club Chairman