

SHALLOW END	10-29 SUMMARY	30-48 SWIM PILOTS	49-60 WHAT THEY DID	61-73 WHAT HAPPENED	SPORT ENGLAND		◀ 1 ▶
DEEP END	75-85 PRINCIPLES	86-97 RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE	98-110 SWIMMING OFFER	111-129 CUSTOMER JOURNEY	130-150 COMMUNITY OUTREACH	151-159 SOCIAL VALUE	🏠



# TRANSFORMING SWIMMING

## WHAT THE SWIM PILOTS LEARNT

March 2020

# HOW TO

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The Swim Pilots looked at how they could improve their facilities to make life easier for their customers; as well as to create a more enjoyable place for people to exercise and have fun.

Depending on what each pool had already, these could be anything from small improvements to more significant refurbishments.

%

28% BAME + 20% disabled Women attending single-sex This Girl Can Swim sessions – compared to the national profile of female swimmers of 8% and 12% respectively\*

**YOU CAN USE THE NAVIGATION ABOVE TO DETERMINE WHAT YOU WANT TO READ NEXT**

**CLICK THIS ARROW TO GO TO THE NEXT PAGE**

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

Brio targeted councilors, community centres, schools and groups (e.g. women’s, young carers) in eight deprived areas in Cheshire West & Chester. The free swims, ‘Leisure’ ‘crash courses’ and group sessions they offered over the summer generated an additional 1,640 visits to local pools.

**PROJECT MANAGERS**

The most successful Swim Local pilots appointed a dedicated project manager to lead and coordinate their swimming transformation.

**NORTHALLERTON LEISURE CENTRE CUSTOMER**

“The pool and changing village are brilliant – thrilled with the improvements!”

**Jump to WHAT HAPPENED** to read more about how the pools became community centres

**See how Sue and Hollie made friends** while tackling their health conditions thanks to Xcel Leisure Centre on YouTube

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**IF YOU ONLY HAVE 5 MINUTES  
DIP YOUR TOE IN THE SUMMARY...**

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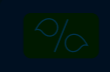
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...IF YOU WANT MORE DETAIL

# SPLASH AROUND IN THE SHALLOW END...

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# ...WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TRANSFORM SWIMMING AT YOUR POOL DIVE INTO THE DEEP END

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### THROUGHOUT THE TOOLKIT YOU’LL SEE THESE ICONS WITH THESE YOU CAN...



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#### Jump to WHAT HAPPENED

to read more about how the pools became community centres



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**QUICKLY DIP INTO A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE FROM A PILOT PROJECT**

**GET AN IDEA OF THE SCALE OF CHANGE THAT'S ACHIEVABLE**



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**JUMP TO ELSEWHERE IN THE TOOLKIT TO FIND MORE DETAIL ON A TOPIC**

**PICK UP A TOP TIP FROM THE PILOTS**



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The most successful Swim Local pilots appointed a dedicated **project manager** to lead and coordinate their swimming transformation.

**READ INSIGHT OR FEEDBACK FROM REAL STAFF AND CUSTOMERS**

Jump to **WHAT HAPPENED** to read more about how the pools became community centres



See how Sue at [Leisure Centre] tackling their [Xcel]

**LINK TO A VIDEO ONLINE**

# HOW TO

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## FINALLY, A QUICK NOTE ABOUT OUR STATS

### CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

Brio targeted council groups (e.g. women's groups) in Cheshire West & Chester. The free swims, Level 1 & 2 'crash courses' and group lessons over the summer generated an additional 1,640 visits to local pools.

Critical Research carried out an independent evaluation of the Swim Local pilot – to assess changing perceptions and satisfaction levels in each pilot pools' locality with swimming, facilities and the swimming offer.

Research was conducted in:

- 2016 (baseline)
- 2017 (interim)
- 2018 (post-intervention)

“The pool and changing village are brilliant – thrilled with the improvements!”

### Data was collected via:

- Community Surveys: telephone interviews with a randomised and representative selection of residents living in close proximity to pilot pools.
- Facility Surveys: online surveys circulated to members and casual users of pilot pools.

For some metrics Critical Research calculated a comparator national benchmark figure – based on data from a randomised and representative selection of residents from across England.

Where the national benchmark figure for a specific metric is available it is quoted for comparison. Pilots appointed a specific metric is available it is quoted for comparison.

The Critical Research evaluation figures quoted in this toolkit are taken from a number of reports and spreadsheets. For ease of reference, data tables for each Swim Local evaluation metric quoted are included in our Learning Locker.

See how Sue and XXX made friends while tackling their health conditions thanks to Xcel Leisure Centre on YouTube







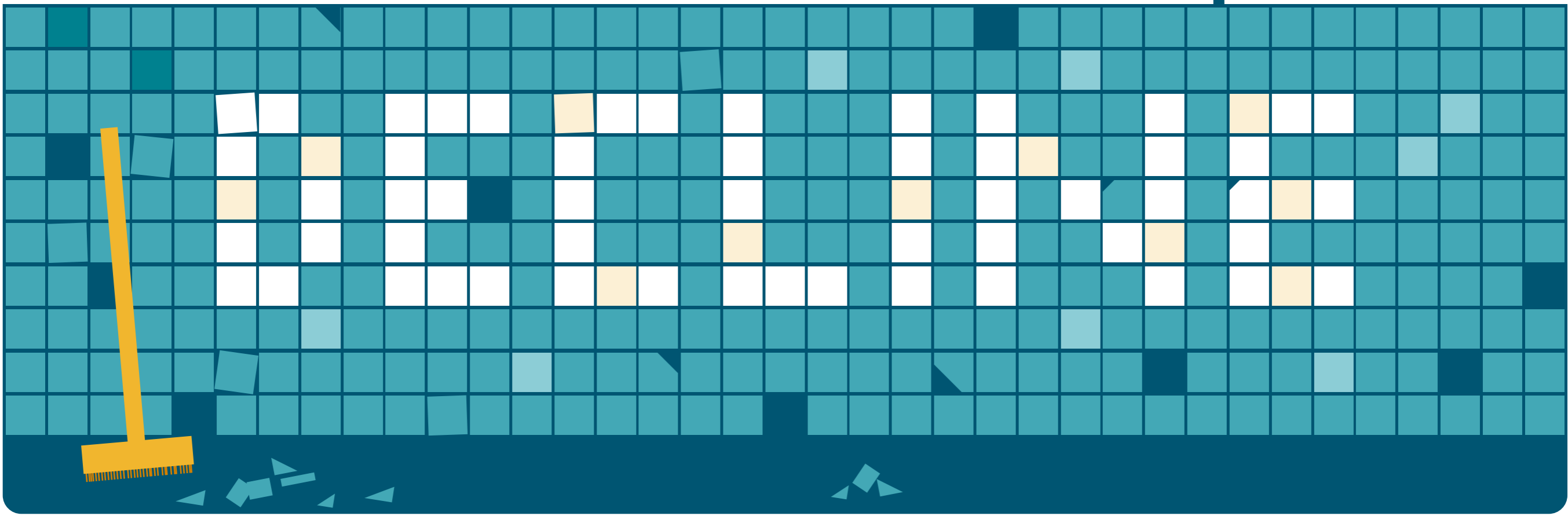
# SPLASH AROUND IN THE SHALLOW END

# SHALLOW END

# SUMMARY



SWIMMING OFFERS HUGE POTENTIAL FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO BECOME ACTIVE – IT IS THE **BIGGEST PARTICIPATION SPORT** BUT IT IS CURRENTLY IN



TO REALISE ITS POTENTIAL WE NEED TO  
**RADICALLY**  
**TRANSFORM SWIMMING**  
AND KICK-START A REVOLUTION IN  
HOW COMMUNITIES USE THEIR POOLS



# SWIMMING NEEDS TO BE MODERNISED



**BROADENING THE OFFER FROM A TRADITIONAL  
LESSONS AND LANES APPROACH...**

...TO A NEW APPROACH!

# WHERE POOLS ARE ACTIVITY SPACES IN THE HEART OF THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Drawing in people to have fun – get active – be part of their community.



TO DO THIS SUCCESSFULLY POOLS  
NEED TO MAKE THEMSELVES RELEVANT TO THEIR  
**LOCAL COMMUNITY**



AND TO ALL THE  
DIFFERENT PEOPLE  
WITHIN IT

THIS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY DOING  
**LOCAL RESEARCH.**  
THIS IS VITAL IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND:

WHAT CUSTOMERS AND  
POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS  
**REALLY** WANT...

NOT WHAT WE **THINK**  
THEY WANT.

Only then can we design **activities, facilities** and **customer experiences** that will appeal to local people and break down their barriers to getting in the pool.



# WE NEED TO BE MORE CREATIVE IN OUR APPROACH AND CONSIDER EVERY ASPECT OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

from home to the pool and back again, if we are to entice more people into the pool, and keep them coming back.



**IF WE DO THIS, SWIMMING WILL BE TRANSFORMED.  
THE EFFECT CAN BE SIGNIFICANT.**

# OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS SPORT ENGLAND HAS INVESTED IN A NUMBER OF SWIM PILOTS

TO TRY OUT NEW APPROACHES – TAKING RISKS AND BEING CREATIVE  
TO FIND OUT WHAT WORKS TO TRANSFORM SWIMMING



ACROSS THE SWIM PILOTS, FROM RELATIVELY SMALL-SCALE INVESTMENTS, WE HAVE SEEN THE FOLLOWING IMPACTS:

# MORE PEOPLE IN THE POOL

In particular people from under-represented – often marginalised – user groups

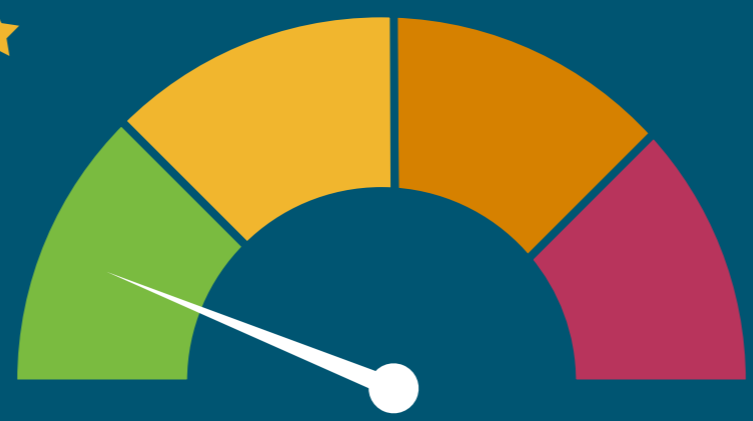
**17% INCREASE**  
 People going swimming in Swim Local communities (up from 33% – compared to 2% national decrease)<sup>1</sup>

**134,231**  
 This Girl Can Swim session visits (70 pools)<sup>2</sup>

**11,791**  
 Adult Learn to Swim session visits (41 pools)<sup>3</sup>

**1,650**  
 Additional disabled swimmers attending Disability Swim pilot pools - nearly 50% of which hadn't used the leisure centre before (5 pools)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot. Compared to 2% decline nationally (down from 47%). <sup>2</sup> This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future Thinking. <sup>3</sup> Adult Learn to Swim Final Report (2016) Future Thinking. <sup>4</sup> Everyone Active, Swimming & Disabled People (2017) Everyone Active.



# HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

**14%  
INCREASE**

Satisfaction with facilities at Swim Local pilot pools (up from 70% – compared to 6% decrease nationally)<sup>1</sup>

**10%  
INCREASE**

Satisfaction with overall experience at Swim Local pilot pools (up from 72%)<sup>2</sup>

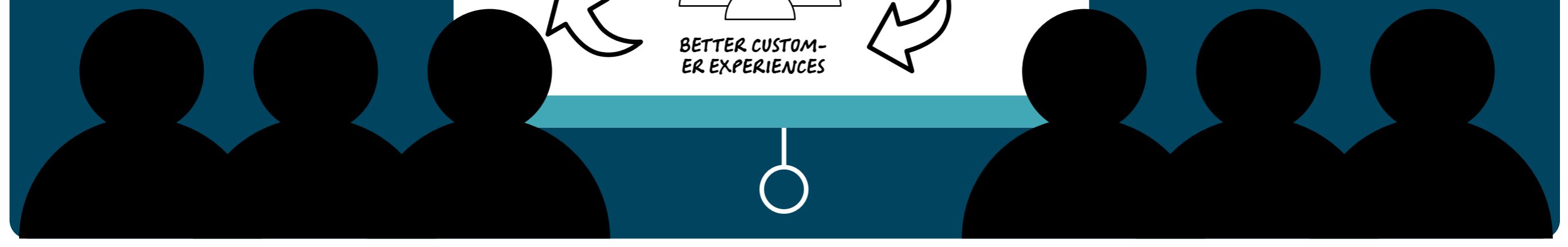
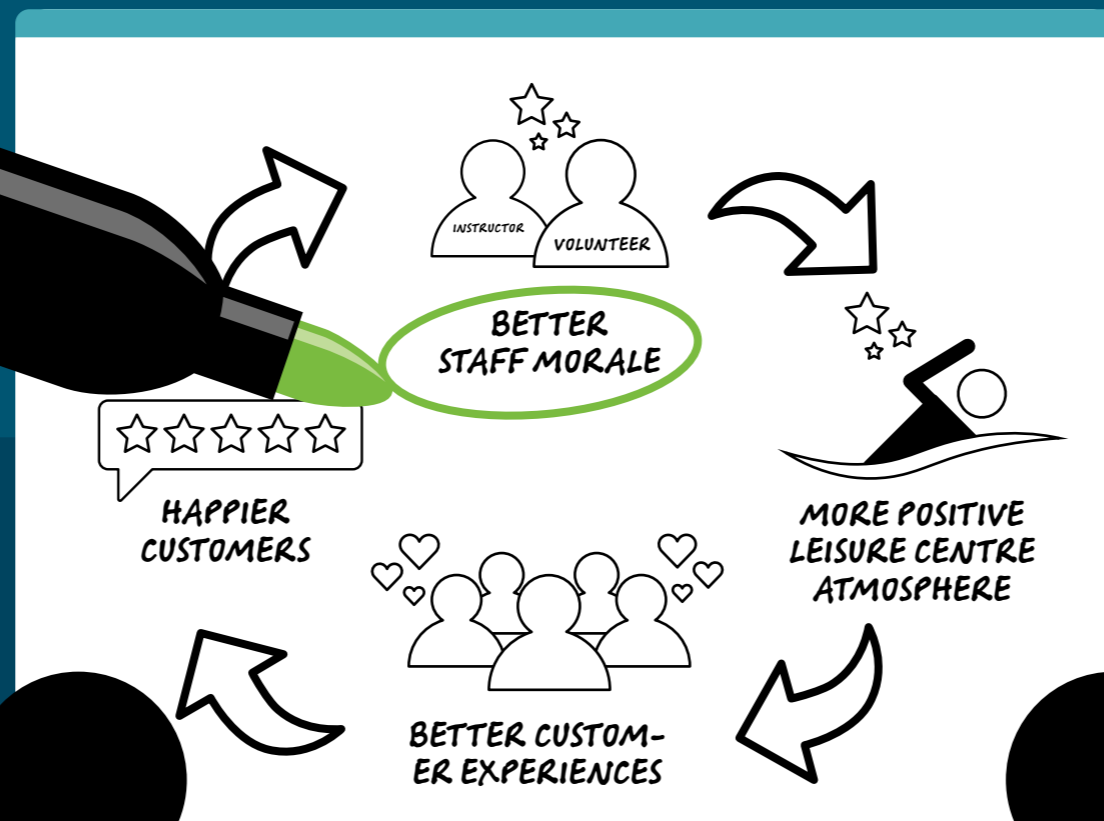
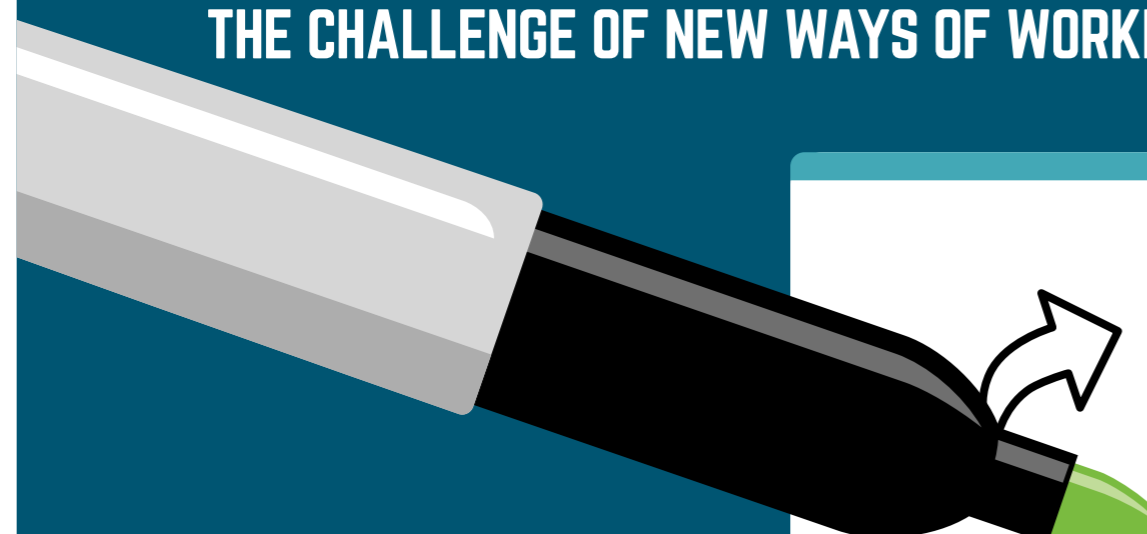
**90%+**

Proportion of This Girl Can Swim, Disability Swim and Adult Learn to Swim attendees satisfied with their session<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot. Compared to 6% decline nationally (down from 70%). <sup>2</sup> Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot. <sup>3</sup> This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future Thinking. Adult Learn to Swim Final Report (2016) Future Thinking. Everyone Active, Swimming & Disabled People (2017) Everyone Active.

# HAPPIER STAFF

MORALE AND JOB SATISFACTION BOOSTED THROUGH INVESTMENT IN TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT; THE CHALLENGE OF NEW WAYS OF WORKING; AND PRIDE IN IMPROVED FACILITIES AND EXPERIENCES





# INCREASED INCOME

FROM INCREASES IN SWIM MEMBERSHIPS, CASUAL SWIMMING  
AND BOOKINGS FOR NEW CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES

**£50,000 INCREASE**

South Somerset year-on-year  
membership income

(2 pools)\*

**£116,000 INCREASE**

North Tyneside  
year-on-year income

(4 pools)\*

**108% INCREASE**

Participation in Sefton  
over six months

(3 pools)\*

\* Local authority data.

# POOLS BECOMING 'COMMUNITY CENTRES'



Offering local people a place to have fun and be social

Supported by volunteers from the local community

Working smarter with public sector partners outside the sport and leisure sphere

Supporting delivery of local strategic priorities

- Physical Health
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Personal Development
- Community Development
- Economic Development

Staffed by a more representative mix of people

# TO ACHIEVE THESE CHANGES THE SWIM PILOTS DELIVERED A SELECTION OF COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES BESPOKE TO INDIVIDUAL POOLS

Across the pilots this involved a vast range of interventions, which in general helped the pool:

## RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE

Become relevant and accountable to its local community

## SWIMMING OFFER

Modernise its swimming offer and become an activity space

## CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Perfect visitors' end-to-end customer journey

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Reach out to their local community

## SOCIAL VALUE

Maximise its social value



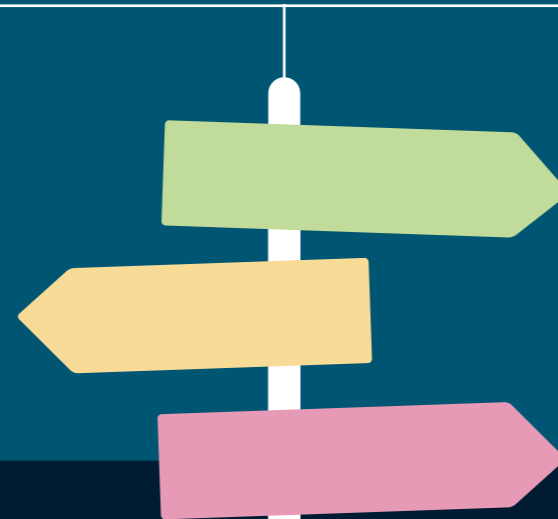
Jump to **WHAT THEY DID** to find out more





The Swim Pilots proved to be a rich learning opportunity. We learnt much from their successes, and also from when things didn't go to plan.

## FROM THE SWIM PILOTS' EXPERIENCES WE HAVE DISTILLED



# 10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

TO HELP PROVIDERS WHO WANT TO TRANSFORM SWIMMING  
TO MAXIMISE THEIR OWN CHANCES OF SUCCESS



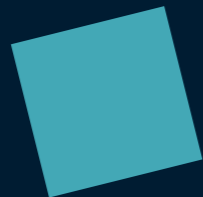
## COMMUNITY INSIGHT

It is essential to start a swimming transformation by gathering **insight** on the local community and its needs – identifying **specific target audiences** who could be encouraged to be more active at the pool



## NO ONE THING

No one thing can transform participation – a **package of complementary interventions** will be necessary



## BESPOKE SOLUTIONS



The package of interventions required will be **different for each pool**



## TRAINING & RECRUITMENT



It is essential to invest in recruitment and training to ensure **staff** have the **capacity, attitude and skills** needed for the transformation



## SHARED VISION

A strong **evidence base** is key to developing a clear vision of success which staff, senior management and local influencers are happy to champion – even if it is controversial to begin with



## CUSTOMER DATA

Good customer **data collection and analysis** is essential for tracking whether participation increases among the target audiences



## CULTURE CHANGE

Transforming swimming requires **culture change**; which needs to happen within owner and provider organisations and in the leisure centre, as much as in the local community



## TIMESCALES

**Timescales** need to account for unexpected delays and the time it takes to remove barriers, especially when recruitment, new technology and procurement are involved



## COMMUNICATION

On-going internal and external **communication** is essential



## TIME

There is no quick fix to transform swimming – **it will take time**



Jump to **PRINCIPLES**  
to find out more



NOW DIVE DEEPER  
**INTO OUR RESOURCE**

LET'S **TRANSFORM** YOUR POOLS!

# SHALLOW END

# SWIM PILOTS



# SPORT ENGLAND WANTS TO HELP KICK-START A REVOLUTION IN HOW PEOPLE USE POOLS

So people can have fun and be active doing a wider range of pool-based activities than just swimming.

They want to help halt the decline in people using their local pool and to encourage greater diversity among the people who come to the pool.

Sport England funded five Swim Pilots between 2015 and 2018 to...

**TEST COST EFFECTIVE,  
SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE  
APPROACHES TO  
TRANSFORMING POOLS**

**HELP PROVIDERS THINK ABOUT  
HOW TO EVOLVE THE SWIMMING  
EXPERIENCE SO THEY ATTRACT  
AND RETAIN MORE POOL USERS**

The Swim Pilots moved away from a traditional sports development approach to one rooted in

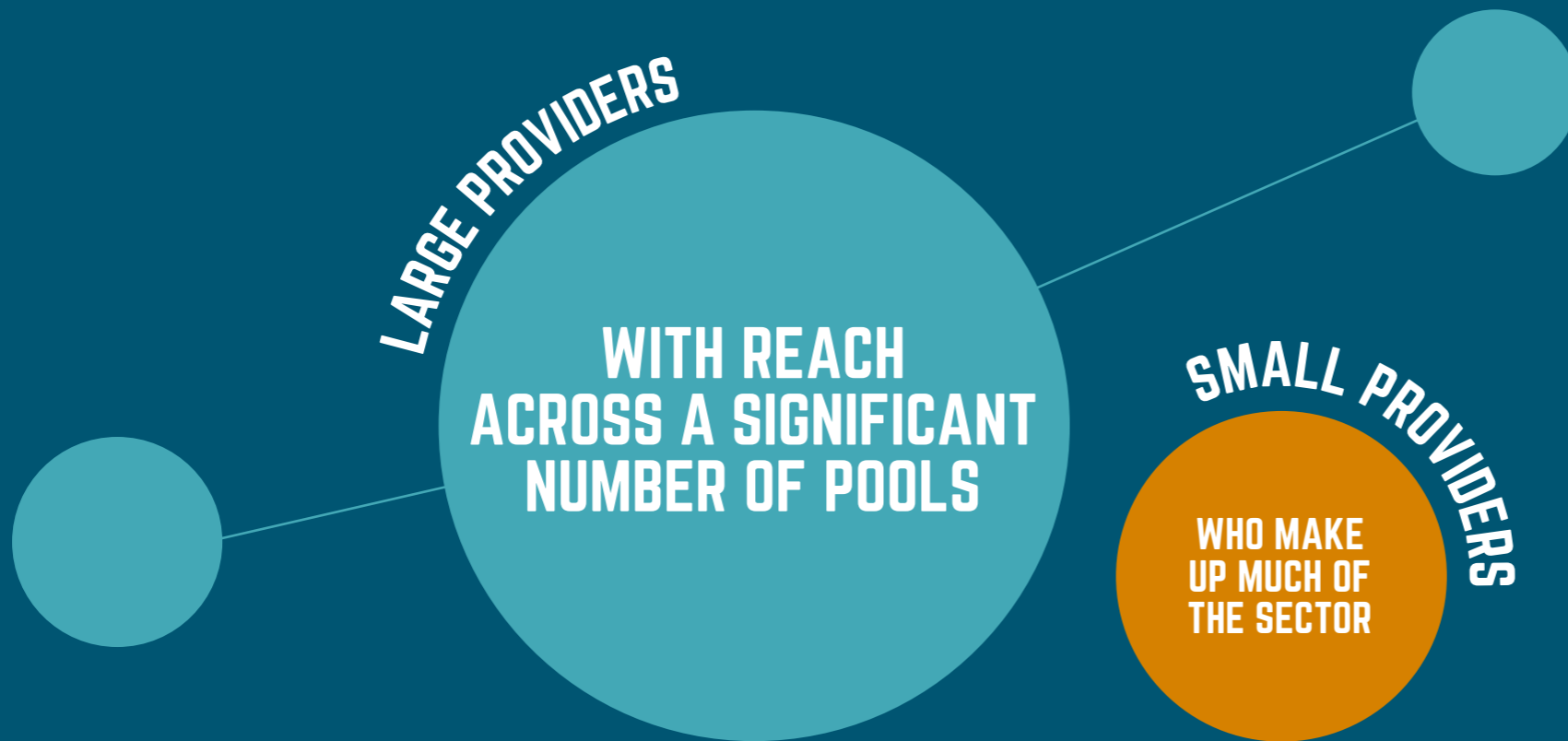
# ENCOURAGING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AND REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

They encouraged more people to choose to have fun and get active at the pool because...





# THE SWIM PILOTS TRIED OUT NEW NEW APPROACHES THROUGH BOTH:



They invested in improvements on the basis that this outlay would be recouped by **more people** coming through the door and **revenues increasing**.

THE SWIM PILOTS ENABLED PROVIDERS TO BE...

# CREATIVE & TAKE RISKS

TRYING OUT ACTIVITIES & APPROACHES  
THEY HAD NEVER DONE BEFORE



“Being a pilot encouraged us to **think outside the box**, as it was a ‘fail-safe’ environment. Using our **Ideas Factory events** we took our engagement with the local community and existing customers to another level. This involved taking risks and doing something completely different to the norm; however as a result we’ve **created more than just swimming opportunities.**”

The pilots came together as a community, sharing ideas and learning from each other.

The learning from the Swim Pilots is captured in this resource, so that providers who want to transform the use of their own pools can see how the Swim Pilots did it and what happens when you try new approaches.

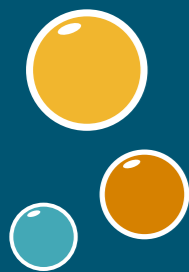


## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# OVERVIEW: SWIM LOCAL

The majority of the 5,000+ pools in England are owned by local authorities, and run by the authority, their leisure trust or a smaller commercial operator.

These providers are key to unlocking growth in the number and diversity of people swimming in England; in particular by improving customers' experiences.



### WHY



This pilot enabled providers running local authority-owned pools to make a set of fast, affordable, small-scale improvements across Swim England's Three Frontiers of Swimming.

### WHO



Improvements were specific to each pool and were targeted to appeal to locally specific target audiences (e.g. older people, low income families, BAME).

### WHAT



Swim Local tested the effect of these improvements to facilities, services and customer experience; capturing the lessons learnt along the way.

### WHERE



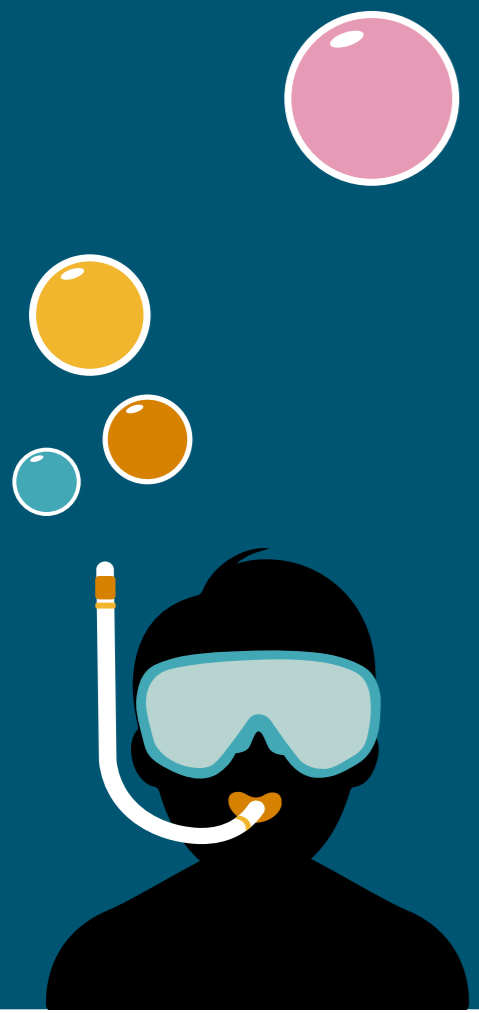
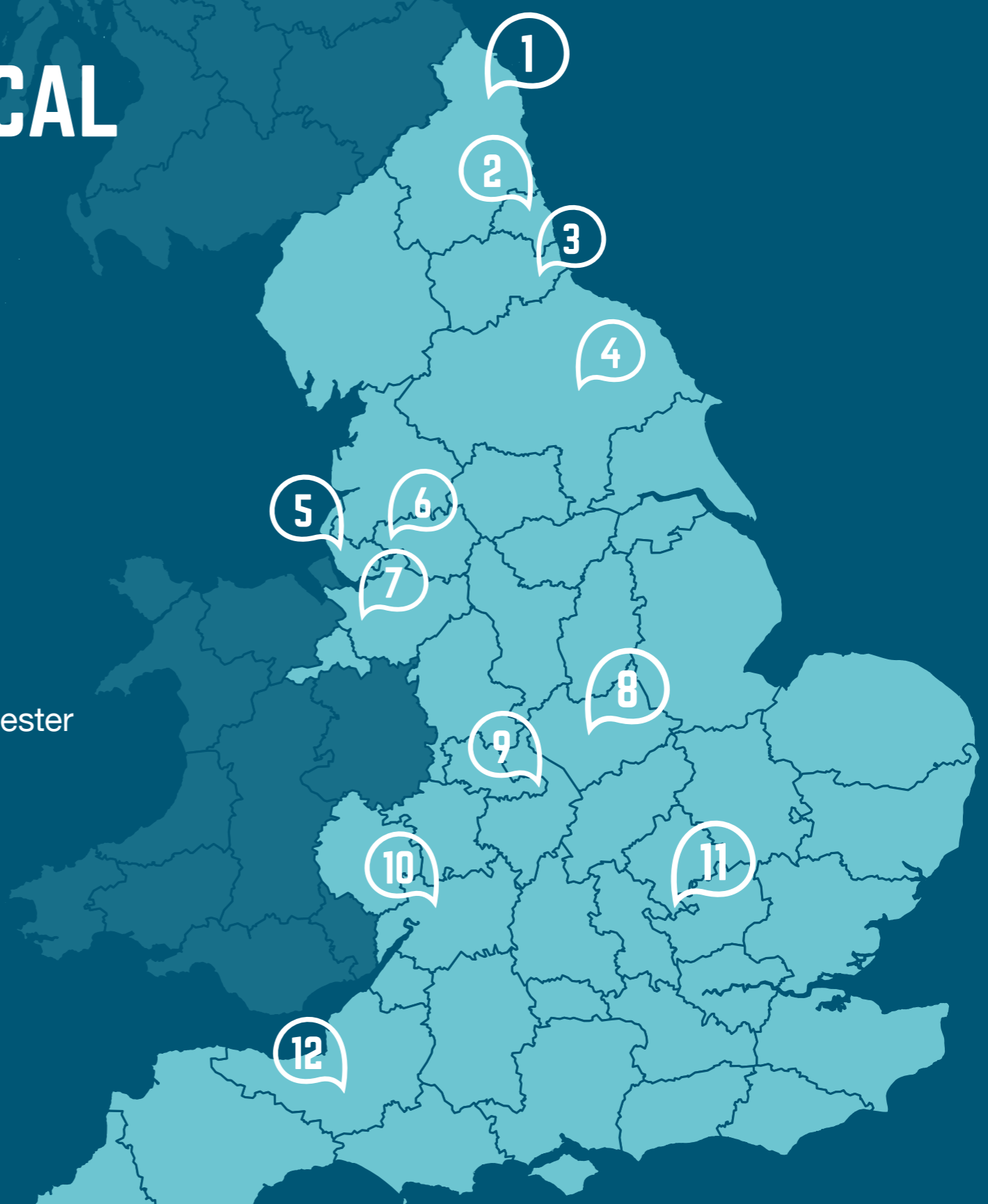
At 38 pools across 12 local authorities, in partnership with their operators.

# 1

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# SWIM LOCAL PILOTS

- 1 Northumberland
- 2 North Tyneside
- 3 Durham
- 4 Hambleton
- 5 Sefton
- 6 Salford
- 7 Cheshire West & Chester
- 8 Leicester
- 9 Coventry
- 10 Cheltenham
- 11 Luton
- 12 South Somerset



# 1

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# STATS: SWIM LOCAL

Each local authority carried out their own local research – generating insight so they better understood the needs of their communities.

They used this insight to guide their thinking on specific audiences to target and the interventions that would be most likely to get them visiting their local pool.

Starting with this insight was crucial - as everything they did was grounded in evidence. It focused them on what the **customer** wanted, not what the provider **thought** they wanted.



“Ask yourself, how do you **know what the community wants**? Don’t make assumptions about what people want. **Ask them**. First, what are their barriers to swimming? Second, what do they want?”

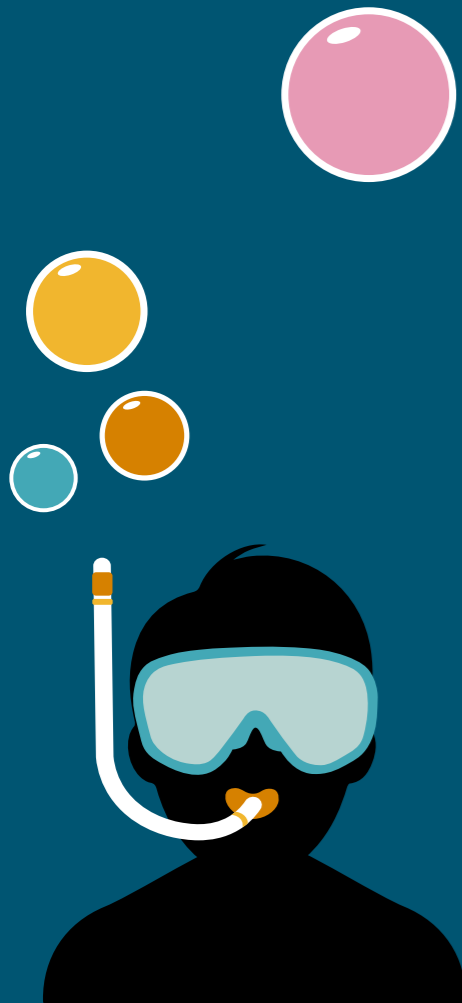
1-4 PILOT SITES  
PER LOCAL AUTHORITY

TOTAL INVESTMENT:  
£3.9M

1/3 CAPITAL + 2/3 REVENUE

SMALLEST PROJECT:  
£193,000 / 2 POOLS

LARGEST PROJECT:  
£541,000 / 4 POOLS



# 1

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# SUCCESS: SWIM LOCAL

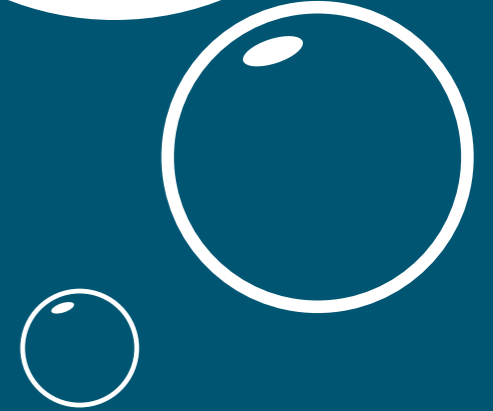
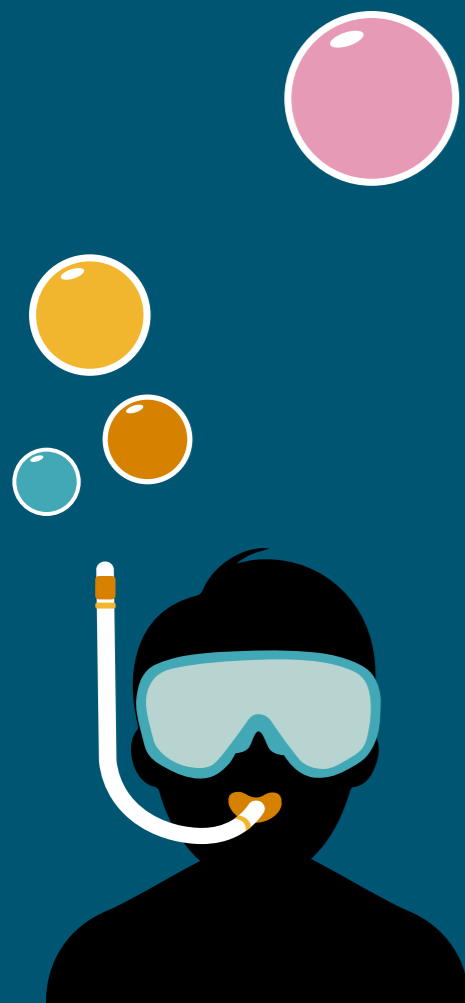
 SALFORD

JIM IS AN 80 YEAR OLD DIABETIC, WHO HAD RECENTLY STARTED USING THE GYM AT IRLAM LEISURE CENTRE.

He used to love swimming but hadn't been in a pool for about 15 years.

The **Your Pool. Get In!** activators spoke with Jim while he was visiting the gym. They spent some time getting to know him; helping him understand the pool timetable and showing him around the pool facilities. Jim wasn't ready to start swimming straight away; it had been such a long time since he last swam and he was unsure about the mixed gender changing rooms.

A few months on, the team met Jim again and with their encouragement he ventured in to the pool. He's now added a weekly pool session into his fitness routine and his confidence in the water continues to go from strength to strength.





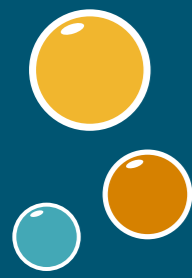
SWIM PILOT  
PROFILE

# OVERVIEW: THIS GIRL CAN SWIM



More women swim than men but the decline in swimming participation is happening more rapidly among females.

This is despite swimming being the sport women are most likely to say they'd like to do more of.



<b>WHY</b>	?	<b>WHO</b>	?	<b>WHAT</b>	?	<b>WHERE</b>	?
<p>This pilot delivered customer-centric experiences to encourage more women to swim in public pools, in keeping with the tone of the national <b>This Girl Can</b> campaign.</p>		<p>Targeting women aged 35-55 who wanted to be more active to improve their health and well-being, and to have 'me time'.</p>		<p>It encouraged them to swim without judgment of their appearance or ability at weekly, female-only sessions at their local pool.</p>		<p>At 70 pools run by Everyone Active, GLL, Nottingham City Council, Places for People and Serco.</p>	

# 2

# STATS: THIS GIRL CAN SWIM

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

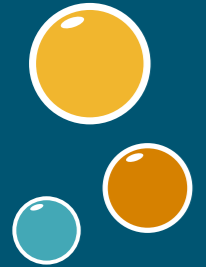


Sessions were most popular with lapsed and current swimmers – so helped encourage women back to swimming, and to maintain their activity habit.

By the end of the sessions the proportion of women who'd been inactive in the previous week halved.

 CHESHAM LEISURE CENTRE

“Our customers **love the sessions**; saying they’ve improved their confidence, general activity and weight loss.”



**6,949 THIS GIRL  
CAN SWIM SESSIONS\***

**134,231 SESSION VISITS\***

**21 SWIMMERS PER  
SESSION (AVERAGE)\***

**90% SATISFIED  
WITH THEIR SESSION\***

**30% ATTENDED 6  
OR MORE SESSIONS\***

\* This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future Thinking.



# 2

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# SUCCESS: THIS GIRL CAN SWIM

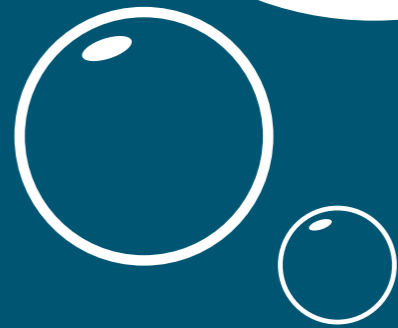
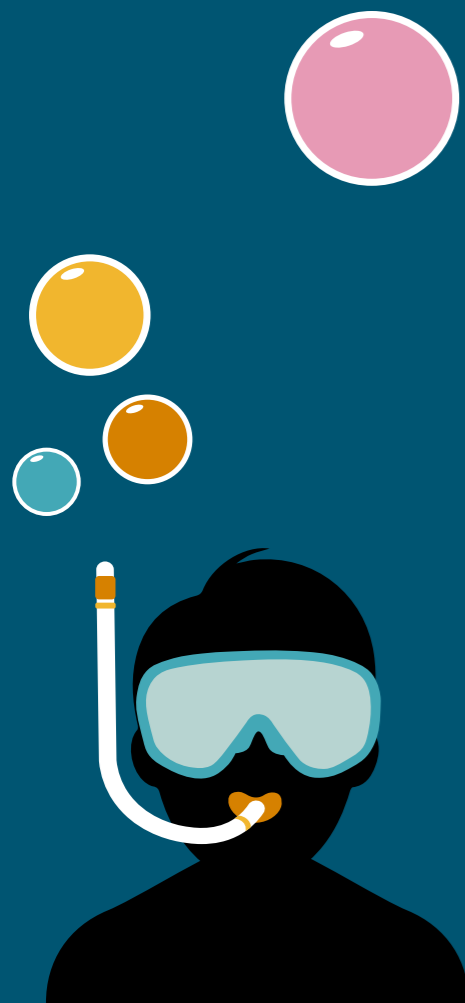
 NOTTINGHAM

## CLAIRE HEARD ABOUT THIS GIRL CAN SWIM SESSIONS FROM HER AUNT, WHO'D ALREADY BEEN ALONG.

Claire found swimming such a great way to forget about her GCSE revision for a while that she encouraged her cousin, who was also sitting exams, to go too.

Claire found the activator really encouraging; keeping her motivated enough to improve her swimming ability.

Although her cousin and aunt rarely engaged with the activator themselves, they all enjoyed having fun and exercising together.





SWIM PILOT  
PROFILE

# OVERVIEW: ADULT LEARN TO SWIM

1 in 5 adults can't swim – especially younger adults and those from less affluent communities.

The cost of swimming lessons is a significant barrier for these groups; who may also be under the impression swimming is unappealing or inaccessible.



<b>WHY</b>	?	<b>WHO</b>	?	<b>WHAT</b>	?	<b>WHERE</b>	?
The pilot provided an appealing, affordable and accessible way for adults to learn to swim and build their water confidence.		Targeting lower income young parents with children who are starting to swim.		It offered them a free set of lessons over 10 weeks.		At 41 pools run by Nottingham City Council and Serco.	

# 3

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# STATS: ADULT LEARN TO SWIM

A fifth of learners had never tried swimming before, and almost half had never been to the leisure centre before.

Their water confidence improved and many went on to pay for further lessons or other swimming sessions and classes.

The sessions were also popular with fairly confident swimmers who wanted to re-start their activity habit or improve their technique.

 NEW ADULT SWIMMER

“I’m feeling more confident in the water after just two sessions!”

**1,449 ADULT LEARN TO SWIM SESSIONS\***

**11,791 SESSION VISITS\***

**8 SWIMMERS PER SESSION (AVERAGE)\***

**93% SATISFIED WITH THEIR SESSION\***

**43% HAD NEVER BEEN TO LEISURE CENTER BEFORE\***

\* Adult Learn to Swim Final Report (2016) Future Thinking.



# 3

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# SUCCESS: ADULT LEARN TO SWIM

📍 NOTTINGHAM

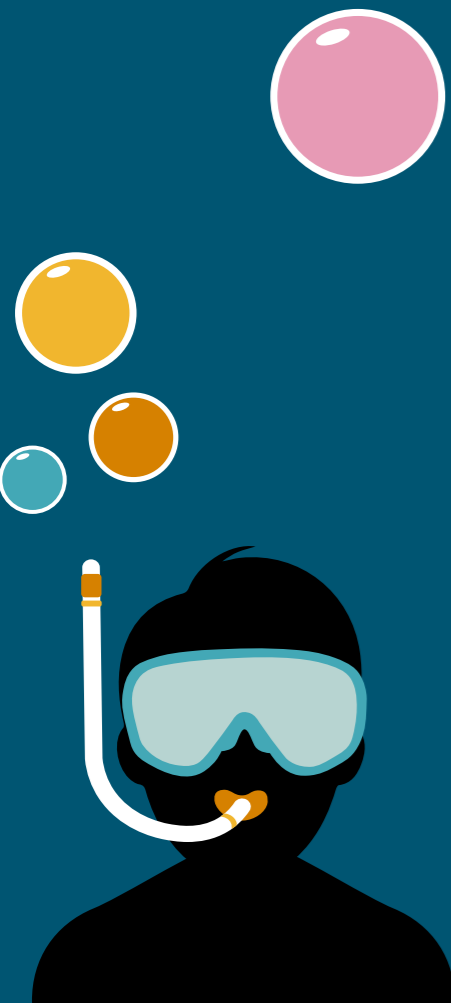
## TWENTYSOMETHING NERVOUS SWIMMER JESS STARTED FOLLOWING HER LOCAL LEISURE CENTRE ON FACEBOOK

When they started promoting their new Adult Learn 2 Swim sessions she signed up; so that she could really have fun with her niece and nephew when she goes to the pool with them, rather than worrying about the deep end.

🗣️ JESS, NOTTINGHAM

“I’ve never been a good swimmer and the deep end frightens me. I’ve started helping out with my niece and nephew so I wanted to **learn** and get **more confident**.”

“The **Adult Learn to Swim** sessions are great as the teacher is always there with me, so I never get scared.”





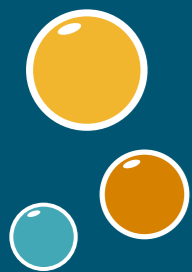
## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# OVERVIEW: DISABILITY SWIMMING

15% of swimmers have a disability.<sup>1</sup>

If disabled swimming was a sport in its own right it would be the ninth largest sport in England.

It is important that more pools provide facilities and services to make themselves more welcoming places for disabled people to have fun and get active.



### WHY



The pilot developed good practice in catering for the needs of disabled people, and attracting more of them to try swimming.

### WHO



Targeting disabled swimmers with a range of ages, abilities, health conditions and impairments.

### WHAT



It embedded knowledge in the provider's head office, and enabled them to support pilot sites in creating more inclusive facilities and activities.

### WHERE

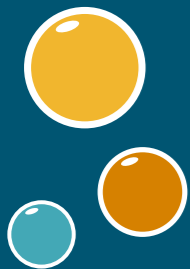


At five pools run by Everyone Active; in partnership with Activity Alliance (formerly The English Federation of Disability Sports).

<sup>1</sup> Swimming: Understanding the decline (2015) internal Sport England paper citing Active Peoples Survey 9, quarter 2 data.

# 4

## SWIM PILOT PROFILE



# STATS: DISABILITY SWIMMING

Participation increases were seen across the board, not just at specific disabled swimming sessions.

This suggests that, once informed of their options and confident the centre's facilities cater for their needs, disabled swimmers will join in a variety of pool-based sessions and classes.

 EVERYONE ACTIVE

“**Disability** and **inclusion** are subtly different concepts. We’ve traditionally had a disability approach but are now looking more at inclusive approaches.”

**ATTRACTED 1,650 NEW  
DISABLED SWIMMERS\***

**167% INCREASE IN  
DISABLED SWIMMERS\***

**46% WERE NEW TO  
THE LEISURE CENTRE\***

\* Everyone Active, Swimming & Disabled People (2017) Everyone Active.



## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# SUCCESS: DISABILITY SWIMMING

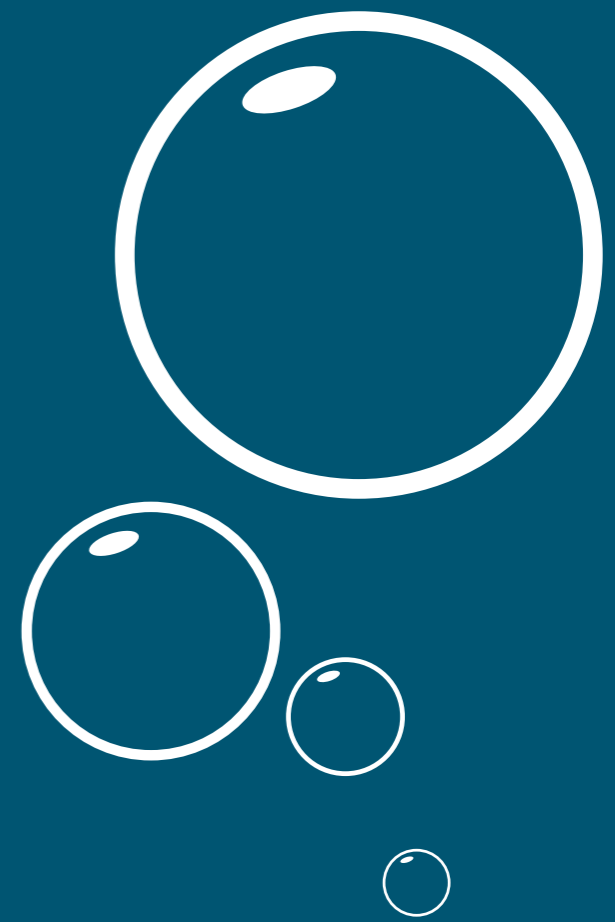
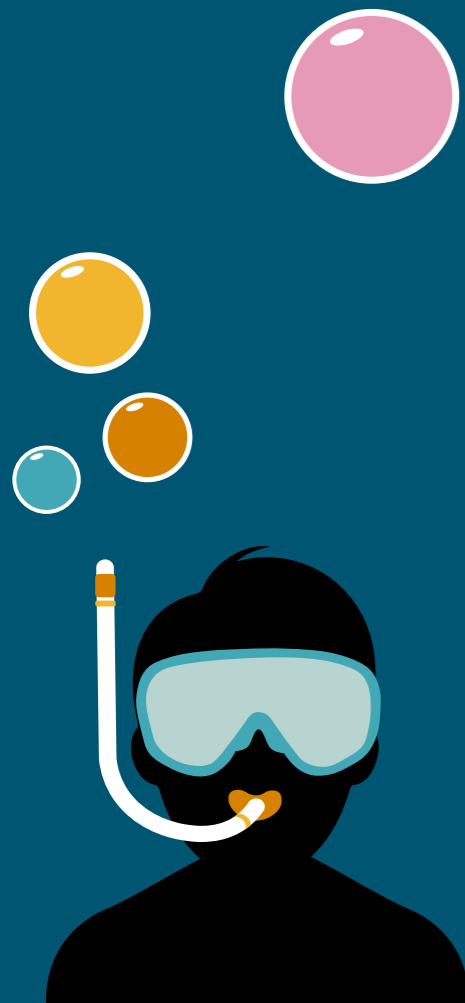
 SALFORD

### HELEN HAS MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

She finds walking difficult due to poor balance and becoming easily fatigued, and thought swimming might be good exercise instead.

She met the **Swim Your Way** activator at the leisure centre to have a tour of the facilities and to chat through the worries she had about swimming with MS. As an incentive the activator gave her a 5 for £5 coupon, to reduce the cost of her first five sessions to £1 each.

Helen loved the facilities and her first **Aqua Relax** session went... swimmingly! Now she is in the swing of things she's signed up for a Freedom Pass – a free membership card that entitles her to a discount on her weekly swim.





## SWIM PILOT PROFILE

# OVERVIEW: RULE THE POOL

SwimTag is a waterproof activity tracker that logs swims, distance and times; linked to a website and app it helps swimmers to monitor and share their performance.



### WHY



The pilot tested whether weekly mass participation challenges using gamification technology would increase participation in swimming.

### WHO



Targeting existing, occasional and lapsed swimmers.

### WHAT



It encouraged them to complete a 500m swim between Friday and Sunday, while wearing a SwimTag wristband. Fastest times were published in a league table on Sunday evening; allowing swimmers to monitor their personal progress and compete against others.

### WHERE



At 70 pools run by People for Places, in partnership with SwimTag.





# SHALLOW END

# WHAT THEY DID





THE SWIM PILOTS GENERATED INSIGHT ON  
**SPECIFIC LOCAL TARGET AUDIENCES**

AND WHAT THEY MIGHT NEED TO OVERCOME  
**THEIR BARRIERS TO SWIMMING**  
AND HOW THE POOL COULD BE MADE MORE APPEALING TO THEM

Each target audience had to be reached in different ways, with **different messages** about the **benefits of getting in the water** and what was on offer for them at their local pool.

## THEY WERE OFFERED...



**...THAT MET THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS**  
**AND MADE GOING TO THE POOL EASIER AND MORE ENJOYABLE**

The pilots developed bespoke packages of interventions for individual pools. These were tailored depending on the needs of the target audience they wanted to attract and what the pool already provided.

# THE PILOTS USED THE THREE FRONTIERS OF SWIMMING

## TO PLAN THEIR PACKAGES OF INTERVENTIONS

These are the three areas **Swim England's** research has shown are critically important for encouraging people to swim more:

**VISIBILITY &  
RELEVANCE OF  
SWIMMING**

**THE  
SWIMMING  
ENVIRONMENT**

**THE  
SWIMMING  
OFFER**

# SWIM PILOT EVALUATION

When evaluating the Swim Pilots, in particular Swim Local, it is clear that their outputs were more nuanced than simply delivering the Three Frontiers. All that the pilots accomplished led them to delivering **five key actions to transform swimming**, which are outlined in more detail on the following pages.



## RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE

Become relevant and accountable to their local community



## SWIMMING OFFER

Modernise their swimming offer to make the pool an activity space



## CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Perfect their visitors' end-to-end customer journey



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Reach out to their local community



## SOCIAL VALUE

Maximise the social value of their pool





## RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE

# BECOME RELEVANT AND ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

The pilots identified specific local **target audiences** that they wanted to attract to their pool and get more active. These were often groups that were under-represented users of their local pools, or that could benefit most from the physical, mental and social benefits of having fun and being active in the pool.

The pilots used **customer insight** – based on local research – to identify these audiences and to really understand what their local communities wanted. They thought about their journey through the swimming experience, and put together packages of improvements that would specifically appeal to them.

They improved their **customer data collection** procedures, trying to become more proficient in analysing this to monitor change and see if they were attracting more of their target audiences. They proactively sought **customer feedback** and became more dynamic in responding to it; creating a cycle of continuous improvement to help maximise their appeal and relevance to their local target audiences.

### NORTHUMBERLAND

“We became **customer focused** rather than **operations focused**; moving beyond customer information to real knowledge and insight.”



Jump to **RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE** to find out more





## SWIMMING OFFER

# MODERNISED THEIR SWIMMING OFFER

The pilots worked with their pools' existing users to **reprogramme the pool timetable** so the pool could be used as an **activity space**, hosting a range of **new sessions, classes and events** that would appeal to their target audiences. They moved away from using the pool just for swimming – to make use of it to host all types of water-based fun and activities.

The pilots often introduced pool-based **group fitness classes**. Some better integrated their dry-side and wet-side facilities, making pool-based activities an **integral part of their fitness offer**.

The pilots tried to make their new aquatic activities more 'experiential', often incorporating **social elements** and giving customers the chance to share **food and drink**. This helped them to improve people's perceptions about the **value for money** of the pool.

### HAMBLETON

“We need to **change perceptions** about what swimming can be.”



Jump to **SWIMMING OFFER**  
to find out more





CUSTOMER  
JOURNEY

# PERFECTED POOL USERS' END-TO-END CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The pilots empowered their staff to deliver great customer experiences and customer service; giving them **staff training** and involving them in **performance management** processes that facilitate continuous improvement. They consider this the single most important improvement they made.

In particular, the pilots employed **activators** who supported and encouraged new customers on every stage of their journey in to the pool – from meeting people out in the community, to welcoming them to the pool and being on hand poolside to lead them through their first session or class.

The pilots thought about their target audiences' **whole customer journey** – from being at home, through to arriving at the pool... getting ready... being in the pool... getting dressed again... and socialising after. Then they made the changes necessary to remove barriers and make this customer journey excellent.

They **improved their facilities** (and perceptions of their facilities) by making small-scale investments in cleaning, changing facilities and the pool hall. Some invested in modernising their reception and social areas too.

 LUTON

“Piecing together a number of smaller interventions can make a **big overall difference** to someone’s experience.”



Jump to CUSTOMER JOURNEY  
to find out more





## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

# REACHED OUT TO THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

The pilots invested in **better marketing** of their swimming offer – developing new **local swimming brands** and using these for their upgraded marketing materials, advertising and websites. They utilised **social media and videos** to generate a local buzz about the pool.

The most successful pilots did **community outreach**. They built relationships with groups, organisations and local influencers close to their target audiences. Through these they asked potential customers about the services and facilities they wanted at their local pool, and encouraged them to come and have fun in the pool.

The pilots offered information, resources and events that would help to **demystify the pool**, as well as **discounts and incentives** that would encourage people to try out their local pool.

“You can’t just stick up a poster and assume they’ll come – we’ve learnt to put **residents at the heart** of their own swimming behaviour change.”



Jump to **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**  
to find out more





SOCIAL  
VALUE

# MAXIMISED THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE POOL

There are positive community-wide impacts on physical health, wellbeing, education and crime reduction from getting more people active in the pool – a collective **social value**.

The Swim Pilots amplified their contribution to improved wellbeing by running more **group fitness classes** in the pool, and by creating more space and time for people to **socialise** at the pool. This was particularly valuable for groups who may be more socially isolated, such as new parents and BAME women.

The Swim Pilots specifically designed and marketed new facilities and activities to appeal to target audiences that may be more **marginalised within the local community**, such as BAME and older people, and disabled people.

A few pilots took on **volunteers**, giving them a chance to build confidence and skills while they helped to deliver the pool's transformation.

Others worked with public sector partners not traditionally involved in sports development and leisure; finding ways to use the leisure centre and having fun in the pool to deliver **wider social outcomes**.

 NORTH TYNESIDE

“Our centres aren’t just leisure centres, they’re **community hubs**.”



Jump to SOCIAL VALUE  
to find out more



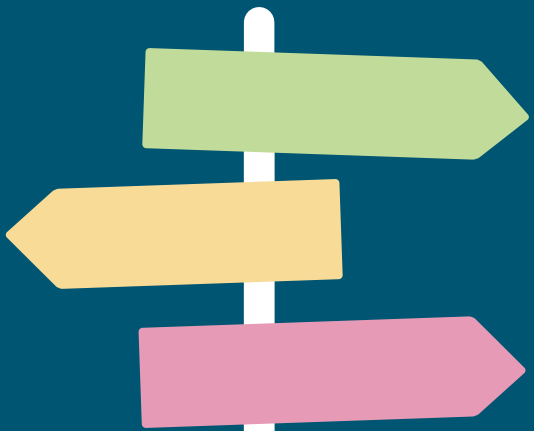


# 10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SWIMMING TRANSFORMATION

Through their trials, errors and successes the Swim Pilots learnt about how to **design and manage a swimming transformation programme** in order to maximise its chances of success.

**10 Guiding Principles** for swimming transformation have been distilled from their experiences:

1. It is essential to start a swimming transformation by gathering **insight** on the local community and its needs – identifying specific **target audiences** who could be encouraged to be more active at the pool.
2. No one thing can transform participation – a **package of complementary interventions** will be necessary.
3. The package of interventions required will be **different for each pool**.
4. It is essential to invest in recruitment and training to ensure **staff** have the **capacity, attitude and skills** needed for the transformation.



# GUIDING PRICIPLES FOR SWIMMING TRANSFORMATIONS

5. A strong **evidence base** is key to developing a clear vision of success which staff, senior management and local influencers are happy to champion – even if it is controversial to begin with.
6. Good customer **data collection and analysis** is essential for tracking whether participation increases among the target audiences.
7. Transforming swimming requires **culture change**; which needs to happen within owner and provider organisations and in the leisure centre, as much as in the local community.
8. **Timescales** need to account for unexpected delays and the time it takes to remove barriers, especially when recruitment, new technology and procurement are involved.
9. On-going internal and external **communication** is essential.
10. There is no quick fix to transform swimming – **it will take time**.

# SHALLOW END

# WHAT HAPPENED



# BY TRANSFORMING SWIMMING

THE SWIM PILOTS ACHIEVED SIX KEY OUTCOMES:



MORE PEOPLE ACTIVE IN  
THE POOL, MORE OFTEN



HAPPIER  
CUSTOMERS



HAPPIER  
STAFF



MORE INCOME  
FOR PROVIDERS



EMBEDDED LEISURE CENTRE  
AS 'COMMUNITY CENTRE'



SUPPORTED DELIVERY OF  
LOCAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



# MORE PEOPLE ACTIVE IN THE POOL, MORE OFTEN

Encouraging more people in to the pool, and keeping people coming regularly, could significantly improve a community’s activity levels; helping to generate all the benefits regular exercise has for physical health and mental well-being.

There is evidence that the Swim Pilots did **increase the number of people able to swim**, and **increase the number of people using the pool**.

 RECEPTIONIST, WOODHOUSE CLOSE LEISURE COMPLEX

“All the classes are full; with first time customers coming along and repeat customers keeping on coming.”

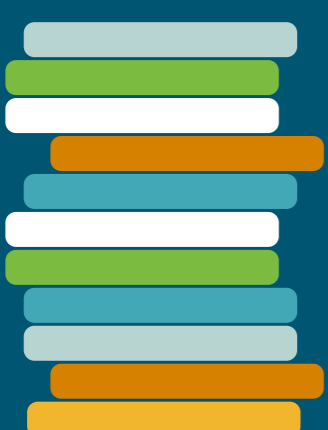
70 pools generated 134,231 **This Girl Can Swim** session visits; nearly a third of women attended six or more sessions.<sup>1</sup>

5 **disability swimming** pilot pools attracted 1,650 new disabled swimmers; nearly half of which hadn’t used the leisure centre before.<sup>3</sup>

11,791 session visits for **Adult Learn to Swim** lessons at 41 pools; creating new swimmers who now attend other sessions and activities.<sup>2</sup>

Disabled participation increased across all swimming activities – not just sessions tailored specifically for disabled people.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future Thinking.  
<sup>2</sup> Adult Learn to Swim Final Report (2016) Future Thinking.  
<sup>3</sup> Everyone Active, Swimming & Disabled People (2017) Everyone Active.





# MORE PEOPLE ACTIVE IN THE POOL, MORE OFTEN

## Swim Local Communities

**11% average increase** in local residents able to swim (up from 71%); as high as 24% in Hambleton (up from 67%).

Compared to 3% decline nationally (down from 70%).<sup>1</sup>

**17% average increase** in local residents going swimming (up from 33%); as high as 36% in Coventry (up from 25%).

Compared to 2% decline nationally (down from 47%).<sup>1</sup>

**12% average increase** in local residents using Swim Local pilot pools (up from 20%); as high as 36% in Durham (up from 10%).<sup>1</sup>

## Swim Local Pools

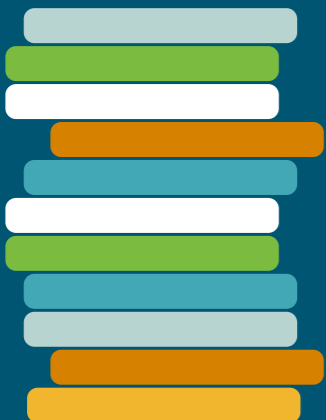
Luton's pools reported annual swims **increased by a quarter** (21,400) in 2 years.<sup>2</sup>

Leicester's pools reported an **average 12% increase** in swims in just 12 months.<sup>2</sup>

Average monthly aqua class attendances almost doubled in three Durham pools in a year – **from 2,335 to 4,495 session visits** – with 115 more people taking part each month.<sup>2</sup>

 GWYNETH, CHELTENHAM

“Just to say how much I enjoyed the recent event at **Leisure at Cheltenham**. I had a lovely swim and have vowed to keep this up as a regular thing. I’m aiming to join as a member in the New Year.”



<sup>1</sup> Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.  
<sup>2</sup> Self-reported local authority data.





# HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

## DURHAM CUSTOMER

“Excellent! Lovely and clean, with helpful friendly staff.”

## RECEPTIONIST, INSPIRE SPORTS VILLAGE

“More customers have been brought in. I’ve seen a difference – they are happy and more chatty.”

Customers were very positive about the services and facilities provided by the Swim Pilots. A **happy customer** is more likely to be a **repeat customer**, who will help to build the pool community and promote it by word of mouth.

### SATISFACTION INCREASES – All Swim Pilots

### SATISFACTION INCREASES – Swim Local pools

93% of **Adult Learn to Swim participants** satisfied with their sessions; 64% said the sessions exceeded their expectations.<sup>1</sup>

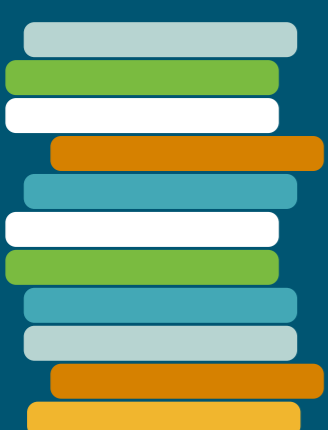
14% average increase in satisfaction with **pool facilities** (up from 70%); as high as 36% in Durham (up from 53%). Compared to 6% decline nationally (down from 70%).<sup>4</sup>

90% of **This Girl Can Swim attendees** satisfied with their session.<sup>2</sup>

7% average increase in satisfaction with **swim sessions** (up from 54%); as high as 25% in Leicester (up from 55%). Compared to no change nationally (stable at 59%).<sup>4</sup>

93% of **Disability Swim participants** satisfied with their session.<sup>3</sup>

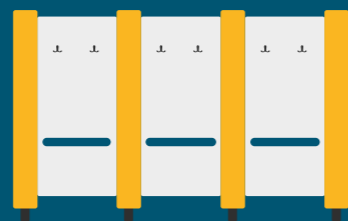
<sup>1</sup> Adult Learn to Swim Final Report (2016) Future Thinking.  
<sup>2</sup> This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future Thinking.  
<sup>3</sup> Everyone Active, Swimming & Disabled People (2017) Everyone Active.  
<sup>4</sup> Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



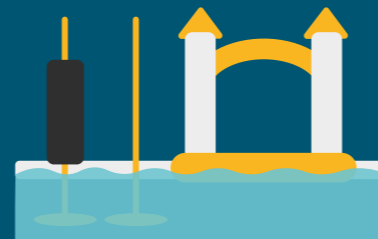


# HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

## SATISFACTION INCREASES



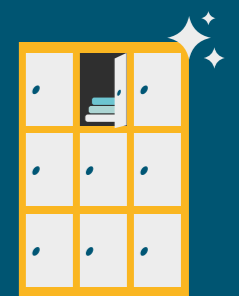
**Changing  
Area Facilities**  
**+18%**  
(up from 51%)



**Pool  
Equipment**  
**+18%**  
(up from 49%)



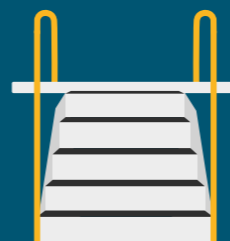
**Facility  
Maintenance**  
**+17%**  
(up from 54%)



**Cleanliness of  
Changing Areas**  
**+16%**  
(up from 50%)



**Poolside  
Atmosphere**  
**+16%**  
(up from 56%)



**Disabled  
Access**  
**+16%**  
(up from 56%)



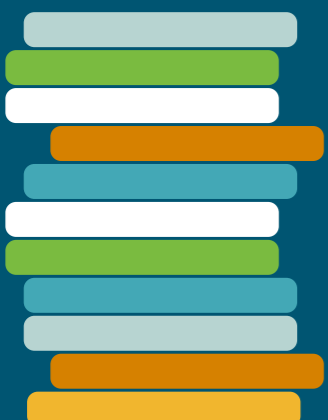
**Session  
Cost**  
**+14%**  
(up from 59%)



**Value  
for Money**  
**+13%**  
(up from 62%)



**Opening  
Times**  
**+13%**  
(up from 51%)



\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



# HAPPIER STAFF

The Swim Pilots widely reported that being proactively involved in their centre’s efforts to transform swimming had a **transformative impact on staff morale and job satisfaction.**

## DURHAM

“The staff responsible for teaching our new aqua fitness classes are thriving!”

Investment in physical improvements gave staff a **nicer working environment;** which they had more pride in and started to take better care of.

Investment in training and personal development made staff feel **valued;** as did being trusted to help foster a change in working culture.

Staff were **busier** and **more fulfilled** by their work – having more customers and the challenge of new tasks and ways of working.

Opportunities such as training, new responsibilities, new jobs and longer shifts gave staff the chance to **progress their career** and increase their salary.





# HAPPIER STAFF

The inspiration and enthusiasm all this injected in to staff created a **positive feedback loop**, which reinforced the benefits for both staff and customers:



## LUTON

“Our staff were so fired up to do well that it generated some friendly competition between our leisure centres!”

## CHELTENHAM

“The challenge reminded managers why they originally wanted to work in sport and leisure – which sometimes gets forgotten day-to-day.”





# MORE INCOME

More customers attending more often also generates more income for providers. An evaluation of the financial impact of the Swim Pilots has not been carried out but it is a fair assumption that **increases in participation will have generated increases in income**. There is anecdotal evidence from the Swim Local pilots to support this.

## NORTH TYNESIDE

Four **North Tyneside** pools generated an additional £116,000 of income in their year as a Swim Local pilot – a 13% increase.\*

*(Swim Local grant: £198,219)*

## SOUTH SOMERSET

Casual swim income increased at **South Somerset's** two Swim Local pools. Membership income increased by more than £50,000 year on year.

They saw a marked increase in income from pay-as-you-go customers attending aquatic classes – in some months tripling the income of the previous year.\*

*(Swim Local grant: £193,600)*

## SEFTON

Sefton estimate that in six months the 108% increase in participation **Your Pool. Get In!** generated resulted in an additional £59,000 of income. Some of this was from a 37% increase in swim memberships.\*

*(Swim Local grant: £531,581)*

\* Self-reported local authority data.





# COMMUNITY CENTRES

By gathering local insight, doing more effective community outreach, and improving facilities and designing services to specifically appeal to key target audiences in their local community the Swim Pilots (and in particular the Swim Local Pilots) aimed to make their pools **more relevant** to more people in the communities they are located in. The increases in participation and customer satisfaction already highlighted indicate that the pilots achieved this.

In becoming more inclusive and attracting a wider array of local residents, and by actively recruiting from the local area, some Swim Pilot pools have become **more representative** of their local community.

## LUTON

Luton's population is 60% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), but historically only a quarter of swimmers and a tenth of staff were BAME. **Your Pool** adopted a 'people like me' approach to marketing and recruitment images, and tailored activities to suit the BAME people in their community. As a result the number of older male BAME customers increased 254% (277 people) and BAME females by 19% (1,130). The number of BAME swim teachers, activity assistants and lifeguards more than doubled, and they now make up a quarter of the workforce.





# COMMUNITY CENTRES

As a result of delivering their Swim Pilot projects pools made themselves **more valuable community assets** and began to reposition themselves as **community centres** at the heart of their host community.

- Generated a **£341 annual social value for each new swimmer** they created – from the wider benefits regular swimming has for community health, wellbeing, education and crime reduction.\*
- Amplified this social value by **specifically targeting marginalised user-groups** who were less likely to be using the pool but for whom the health and wellbeing benefits of aquatic exercise may be specifically pronounced; such as BAME, disabled people, older people, people suffering from ill health and injury, and low income families.

## 🔄 CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

**Brio Leisure** estimate they have generated £74,250 of social value by giving 1,640 people access to swimming lessons and passes as part of their Swim Local project.



\*Physical Activity – A Social Solution (2018) UK Active & DataHub.



# COMMUNITY CENTRES

## SEFTON

“We used the pool as part of the school holiday Park Nights initiative – a Police & Crime Commissioner funded programme to reduce antisocial behaviour.

So on a Friday night teenagers were having an Ibiza Pool Party – rather than out on the streets terrorising people!”

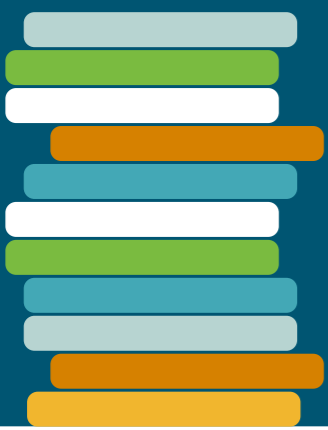
- Became places where people could build friendships and support each other, by providing **more pool-based group fitness classes** as well as **more time and nicer spaces for socialising** after swimming.
- Became places where **volunteers** could contribute to the community while building confidence and skills and getting social interaction.
- Began to work smarter with partners from other public sector services – using being active in the pool as a means to **tackle social issues** not traditionally related to sports and leisure.

## LEICESTER

By replacing their social area’s tables and chairs with sofas **Swim Leicester** encouraged their customers to get comfy and stay awhile longer.



Jump to SOCIAL VALUE to find out more







# LOCAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The outputs and outcomes of the Swim Pilots' efforts to transform swimming have contributed to the five outcomes of Sports England's strategy:

PHYSICAL  
HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH  
& WELLBEING

PERSONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT



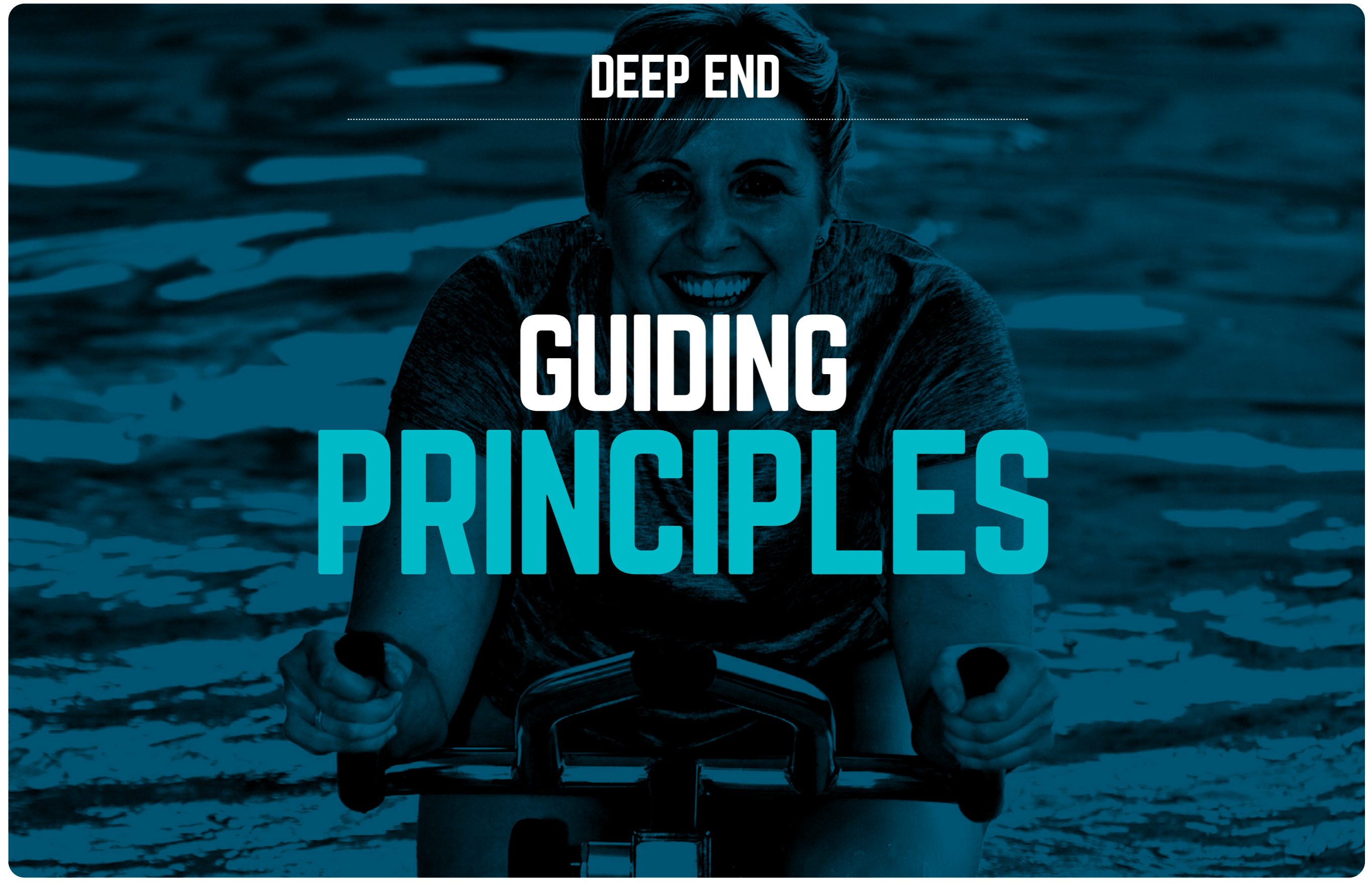
They will have **contributed to delivering local strategies** for: public health and well-being; quality of life; disabled people; carers; older people; equality and inclusion; community participation and cohesion; job creation; workforce and skills development; economic growth; crime reduction; and public sector spending reductions.



# DIVE INTO THE DEEP END

# DEEP END

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



1

# IT IS ESSENTIAL TO START A SWIMMING TRANSFORMATION BY GATHERING INSIGHT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ITS NEEDS – IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC TARGET AUDIENCES WHO COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO BE MORE ACTIVE AT THE POOL

The Swim Pilots focused on encouraging more people from specific **target audiences** in their community into the pool. For example, women, disabled people, older people, families and younger parents, BAME people and those on low incomes.

These were often groups that might gain the most from the physical, mental and social benefits of being active in the pool.

Before they did anything else, the Swim Local pilots did **research** to identify which groups of people in their local community were under-represented users of their local pool – who might be encouraged to use it more.

They gathered **insight** in to **local people's attitudes and behaviours** in relation to swimming:

- Perceptions of the local pool and swimming as an activity
- Motivations for swimming and barriers to it
- Relative importance of different elements of the swimming experience
- Specific preferences and needs of individual target audiences



**NEW RELATIONSHIPS**

To better understand their target audiences the Swim Pilots took time to build relationships with organisations, groups and places in the local community where these people already go.

**EXISTING CUSTOMERS**

The pilots understood that the needs of existing customers would sometimes have to be compromised in order for them to meet the needs of a broader cross-section of their local communities.

# 2

## NO ONE THING CAN TRANSFORM PARTICIPATION – A PACKAGE OF COMPLEMENTARY INTERVENTIONS WILL BE NECESSARY

The Swim Local pilots used their insight to design a **package** of improvements that would address the current weaknesses of their pool and serve the needs of their target audiences; addressing the **barriers** that might be preventing them from coming to the pool.

Each package tended to be a blend of improvements related to:



The **customer service** element was widely considered to be most important. The pilots sought to improve the **whole customer experience** – from contemplating a trip to the pool through to what happens after, and inbetween, visits.

**INTER-LINKAGES**

Some interventions were quick wins; others look longer. In many cases they were interdependent. So the pilots found it was important to think holistically about the **timing** and **sequencing** of their interventions.

**FUNDING**

Having a mix of **capital** and **revenue** funding enabled the pilots to deliver complementary improvements even when these required different types of investment.



# 3

## THE PACKAGE OF INTERVENTIONS REQUIRED WILL BE DIFFERENT FOR EACH POOL

The infrastructure, services and operations of each pool are **unique**, as is the local community it serves. So the Swim Pilots found that a different mix of interventions was required at each pool – tailored to these individualities.

Even within the same locality it wasn't always possible to take a specific initiative and replicate it at a neighbouring pool. Subtle differences in community demographics, staff attitudes or facilities could have a big influence on success.



### ECONOMIES OF SCALE

In some instances the pilots did successfully do specific interventions at more than one of their pools, or in parallel to pools in a neighbouring local authority area.

In these instances they sometimes found they could benefit from **economies of scale** (e.g. by doing joint staff training), **share** equipment (e.g. giant inflatables) or **rotate** activities to keep them fresh (e.g. group fitness classes).



4

# IT IS ESSENTIAL TO INVEST IN RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING TO ENSURE STAFF HAVE THE CAPACITY, ATTITUDE AND SKILLS NEEDED FOR THE TRANSFORMATION

The Swim Pilots found that staff were absolutely critical to success.

Staff were most proactive when they were **engaged** from the start of the pilot; so they understood why change was necessary, their role in it, and how they too would have to change to make transformation possible.

The pilots rolled out **training** to ensure their staff had the right knowledge and skills to deliver the transformation. In particular they focused on enhancing customer service skills and confidence building. They also embedded new **performance management** processes, as they realised that the culture change they were instigating would only be achieved with on-going processes of continuous improvement.

For new roles the pilots began to **recruit** based on whether people had the passion and personality to deliver great customer experiences. They realised it was easier to train enthusiastic people in skills or knowledge, than to adjust the attitudes of people with experience borne of delivering out-dated approaches to sport and recreation.

**PROJECT MANAGERS**

The most successful Swim Local pilots appointed a dedicated **project manger** to lead and coordinate their swimming transformation.

**LOCAL RECRUITMENT**

The pilots realised it was important to recruit people from local communities – so customers would see **‘people like me’** when they visited the pool.



5

# A STRONG EVIDENCE BASE IS KEY TO DEVELOPING A CLEAR VISION OF SUCCESS WHICH STAFF, SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL INFLUENCERS ARE HAPPY TO CHAMPION – EVEN IF IT IS CONTROVERSIAL TO BEGIN WITH

**Staff needed to have a clear vision of the outcomes they were working towards.**

This vision could be controversial, as a swimming transformation can require finding a new balance between **popular** activities that maximise income and more **niche** activities that maximise social value; between the needs of **potential customers** and **existing customers**; and between **short term** investment and **long term** gain.

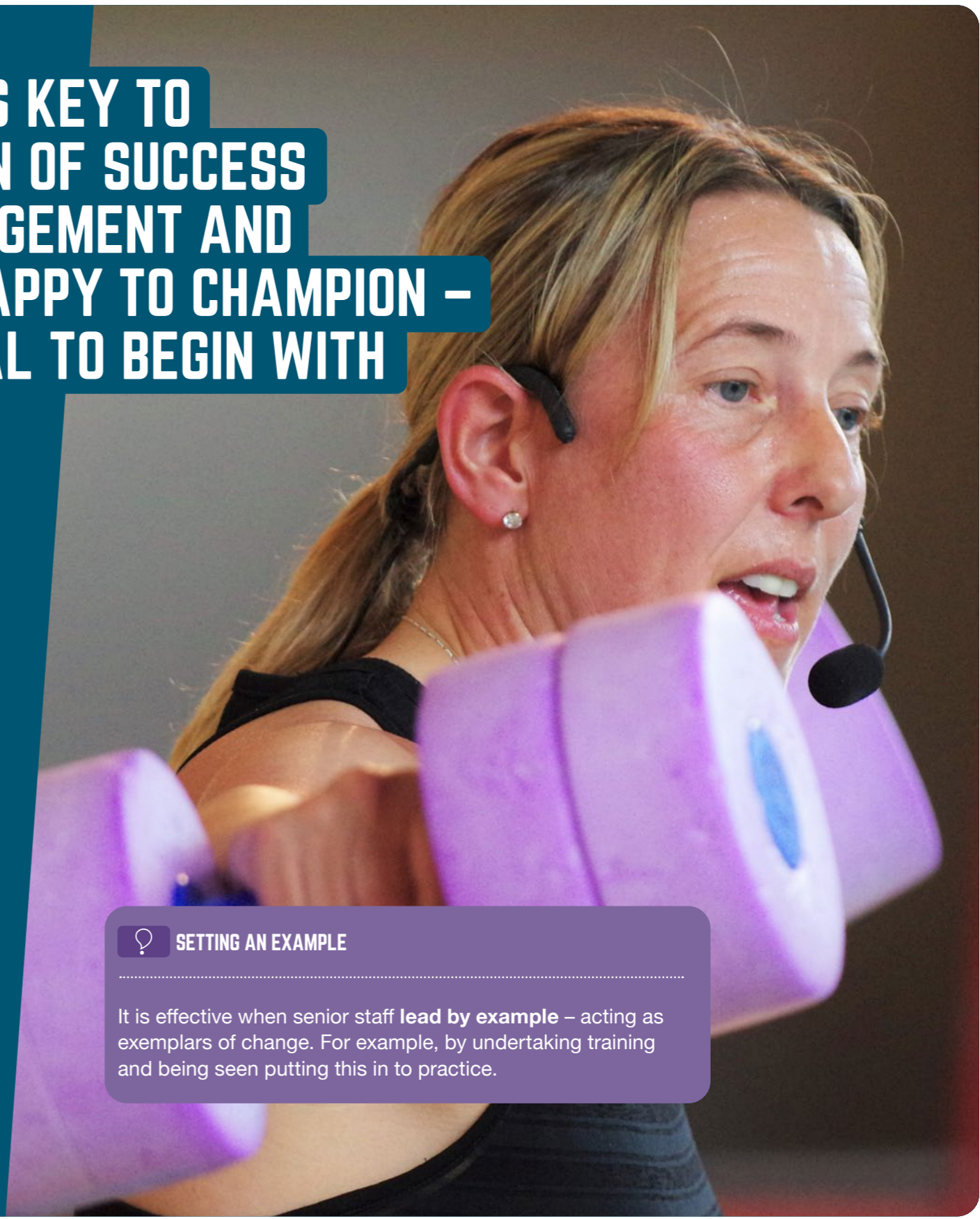
The Swim Pilots found that the **evidence** provided by their insight was key to justifying new approaches and investment. It persuaded staff, senior management and local councillors of the need for change; it engaged them in developing solutions; and gave them the information they needed to become effective champions of the transformation.

**💡 LOCAL POLITICIANS**

Local politicians could be particularly effective champions; spreading the word amongst local communities, and helping to appease swim clubs and customers who were unenthusiastic about change being required from them too.

**💡 SETTING AN EXAMPLE**

It is effective when senior staff **lead by example** – acting as exemplars of change. For example, by undertaking training and being seen putting this in to practice.





6

# GOOD CUSTOMER DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TRACKING WHETHER PARTICIPATION INCREASES AMONGST THE TARGETED AUDIENCES

The Swim Pilots often learnt this by realising they did not have the detailed data they needed to tell whether they had got more people from specific groups in to their pools; or to assess the impact of specific initiatives.

They realised it was essential to determine upfront what monitoring data they would require and put in place effective means to capture this.

They invested in: systems to better record visits to their pools; incentivising casual users to share their data; ensuring staff were capturing data; improving the accuracy of data entry; and more effective data analysis. Sometimes technological difficulties prevented or delayed them from making the progress they wanted.

The pilots learnt to value customer feedback – both positive and negative. They used this anecdotal feedback as a barometer of success.

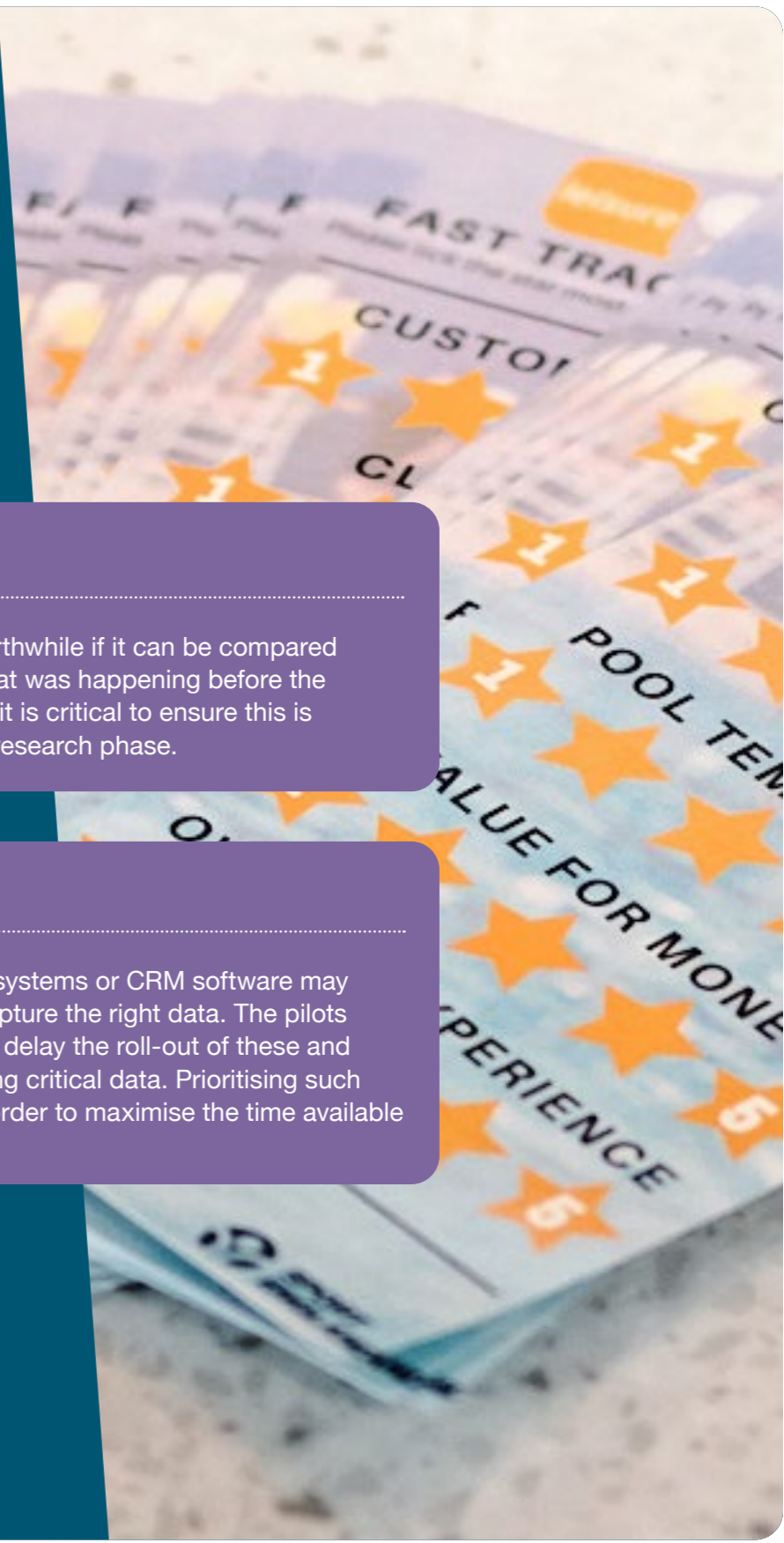
Good feedback was communicated to staff to boost morale. Bad feedback was fed into managers, so it could be addressed and help identify where they still had work to do.

**BASELINE DATA**

Monitoring data is only worthwhile if it can be compared to a robust **baseline** of what was happening before the transformation began – so it is critical to ensure this is collected during the initial research phase.

**TECHNOLOGY**

Technology such as entry systems or CRM software may need to be upgraded to capture the right data. The pilots found that **IT issues** could delay the roll-out of these and prevent them from capturing critical data. Prioritising such upgrades is necessary in order to maximise the time available to resolve these issues.



7

# TRANSFORMING SWIMMING REQUIRES CULTURE CHANGE; WHICH NEEDS TO HAPPEN WITHIN OWNER AND PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS AND IN THE LEISURE CENTRE, AS MUCH AS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Swim Pilots always knew they needed to change their local communities' perceptions and behaviours in relation to their pools.

They came to realise it was also necessary to change their own **perceptions** and **behaviours** towards swimming, and start an organisational **culture change**:

- To focus on **insight**, **target audiences** and **customer journeys** as the keys to changing people's behaviour.
- To make decisions rooted in **community** and **inclusion**, rather than always favouring existing customers and profit.
- To consider the pool as an **activity space**; not just a place to swim.
- To treat the pool and gym as interrelated elements of **a single fitness facility**.
- To understand that to get people in to the pool they first had to **get out** in the community.
- To build a workforce dedicated to making every visit to the pool a **great customer experience**.
- To embrace **customer feedback**, even the negative.
- To work with local teams from other sectors to use the pool to deliver **non-sport related outcomes**.



8

# TIMESCALES NEED TO ACCOUNT FOR UNEXPECTED DELAYS AND THE TIME IT TAKES TO REMOVE BARRIERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN RECRUITMENT, NEW TECHNOLOGY AND PROCUREMENT ARE INVOLVED

The Swim Local pilots found that their transformation could be held up by processes and practicalities **outside of their control**.

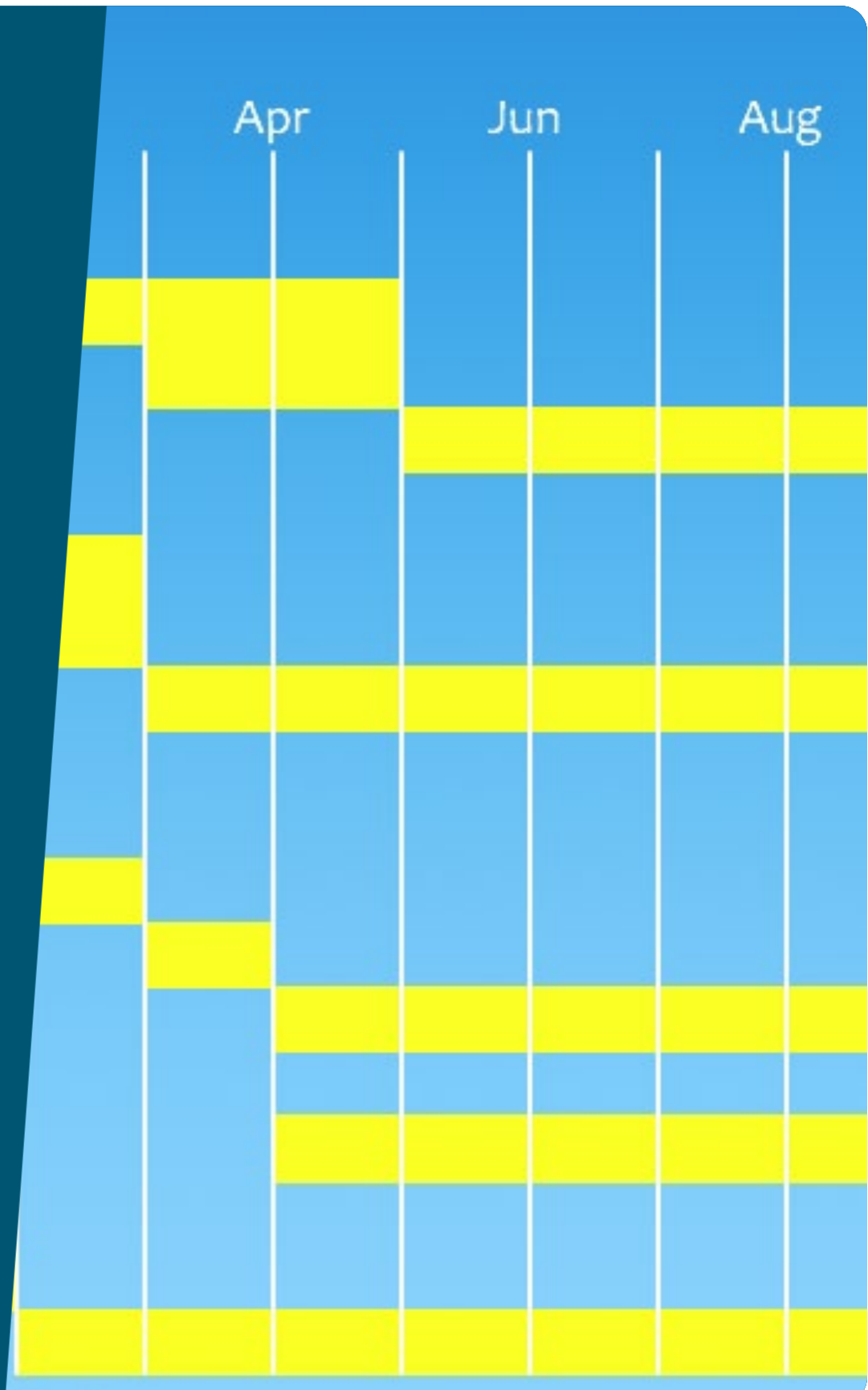
For example, a supplier’s delivery timescale or the need to get planning permission for new outdoor signs.

In particular providers working through local authority channels found that it could take time to work with business support teams responsible for communications, recruitment, IT, legal and procurement. Their processes were often **inflexible** and unsuited to delivering innovative projects in a short timescale.

The pilots found that **early engagement** with these teams and **on-going communication** were key to making progress.

**MARKETING**

Local authority communications teams and their suppliers often lacked the creativity and capability to deliver the style and scale of marketing required. Operators that were able to procure their own marketing contracts or employ in-house marketing teams generally fared much better.



# 9

## ON-GOING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

The Swim Pilots found that it wasn't just customers and potential customers they needed to speak to about their swimming transformation.

They had a whole host of people to **keep in the loop** about why swimming needed transforming; what change would achieve; what was happening to get there; and how they could help.



\* Where pool was local authority owned

**RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

The pilots found that it took **time** to build relationships with the clubs, groups and organisations that could link them to their target audiences. Sometimes it took several missteps before they found the right organisation or employee to connect to.

**OWNERS AND PROVIDERS**

If Swim Pilot pools were owned and operated by separate organisations their projects were most effective when they shared a vision of success which was about more than footfall and income.



10

## THERE IS NO QUICK FIX TO TRANSFORMING SWIMMING – IT WILL TAKE TIME

The relatively short window of opportunity afforded by the Swim Local Pilots was not long enough to complete each pool's transformation. Some made more progress on their journey than others.

This is not surprising considering the **timescales** needed to: collect good baseline data and insight; embed organisational culture change; change the perception of the local community; deal with red tape and supplier delays; negotiate timetable changes with swim clubs; and build relationships with new stakeholders and partners.

The Pilots reconciled themselves to the fact that they will only transform swimming if they commit to sustaining a **long-term** process of **continual improvement**.

They know that **patience** and **determination** will be required!



## DEEP END

# RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

# RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE TO COMMUNITY

The Swim Local providers realised that to encourage more people into the water they needed to identify the audiences that they wanted to see more of in their pool, so they could specifically design service and facility improvements to suit them.

To do this they needed detailed information about the communities their pools are located in, and the people who live in them.

The providers also realised they needed better data about people coming to their pools – to be able to monitor the effect of their improvements and see whether they were successfully attracting more of their chosen target audiences.

They began to better value the opinions of their customers; understanding that they were accountable to them. They sought feedback to help refine their interventions, and used it as a barometer of success.



 NORTH TYNESIDE

“We learnt to listen to what the customer wants, not what we **think** they want.”

## LEARNING LOCKER

Download the Sefton **CASE STUDY** on being relevant and accountable  
 Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on being relevant and accountable  
 Download our **TOP TIPS** for collecting customer insight, data and feedback



# INSIGHT

Before doing anything else the majority of Swim Local pilots commissioned third parties to gather insight in to local people's attitudes and behaviours in relation to swimming.

The research explored:

- Motivations for swimming and barriers to it
- Awareness and perceptions of local facilities, swimming activities and prices
- The relative importance of different elements of the swimming experience
- The specific needs of individual target audiences

The opinions of existing swimmers, local residents and leisure centre staff were all considered; with the views of non-swimmers valued as much as those of existing customers.

Insight was gathered through a variety of methods, including: surveys (face-to-face, paper, online, telephone), observations, focus groups, swimming diaries, social media and mystery shoppers.

Local secondary data on socio-demographics, health and sports participation was also analysed; which helped to identify which groups in the local area were under-represented users of the pool, or would benefit most from swimming's positive effects on health and wellbeing. The opinions of people from these groups were then specifically sought through surveys and focus groups.

Although some of the insight was uncomfortable reading, it gave the Swim Pilots honest, current and locally relevant evidence to base their action plans on. It changed their opinions about what they should do to transform swimming.



**COVENTRY**

“Insight isn’t crude footfall and income data – it is data that gives you a detailed understanding of your customer, or potential customer.”

**SEFTON**

Nearly 3,000 people were engaged in the insight research carried out by **Sefton Council’s** in-house Business Intelligence Unit. They reached people with an online survey, survey postcards on display in leisure centres, a Facebook advert and focus groups.



# TARGETING



**This insight defined who within the local community could and should be encouraged to get in the pool, and the specific improvements needed at each pool to encourage these people to visit it.**

The Swim Local pilots used this knowledge to tailor all their outreach and marketing, new activities and facilities, and customer service improvements to appeal to these **target audiences**.

The pilots made sure their improvements covered all of the **Three Frontiers of Swimming** – identified by Swim England as critical to encouraging people to swim more.

**LEICESTER**

Local insight showed that there were areas of high deprivation in the communities around Leicester’s pilot pools; where residents were likely to be less active, more unhealthy and more overweight than the rest of the city. It also showed that despite BME people making up 91% of the local population around Cossington Street Sport Centre and 31% around Braunstone Leisure Centre they accounted for only 70% and 7% of swimmers respectively.

This insight led **Swim Leicester** to target BME people, residents on low incomes and inactive people referred by their GP.

**DURHAM**

Research identified the groups in Swim England’s customer segmentation (such as Prioritising Parents and Well-Being Wannabes) that were common within local communities but not regular visitors to **Durham’s** pools. Mosaic data helped to identify the marketing channels and messages that could be used to best reach these types of consumers.

This approach was so successful Durham are now using it to develop action plans for their other leisure centres; as well as thinking about how to apply it to other public services like libraries.

# OUTREACH

## COVENTRY

The **GoSwim** team run **Ideas Factory** workshops, where people from local low income neighbourhoods (their target audience) come along to co-design events and services with leisure centre staff. These have resulted in some of GoSwim's most successful events, such as Wave Raves and a poolside photography exhibition.

The next Ideas Factory will invite users of the local food bank to get involved in developing ideas for combining being active in the pool with maintaining a healthy and nutritious diet

Through on-going outreach activities with local groups and organisations the Swim Local pilots continually checked back with people from their target audiences; to see whether their improvements were making the idea of a trip to the pool more appealing.

One pilot held regular community engagement workshops, getting residents directly involved in the development of new events and activities.

 [Jump to COMMUNITY OUTREACH to find out more](#) 



# BETTER CUSTOMER INFORMATION

The Swim Local pilots tried to become more proficient in capturing and using customer data – so they could evaluate the success of their initiatives and measure which audience segments they were making headway with.

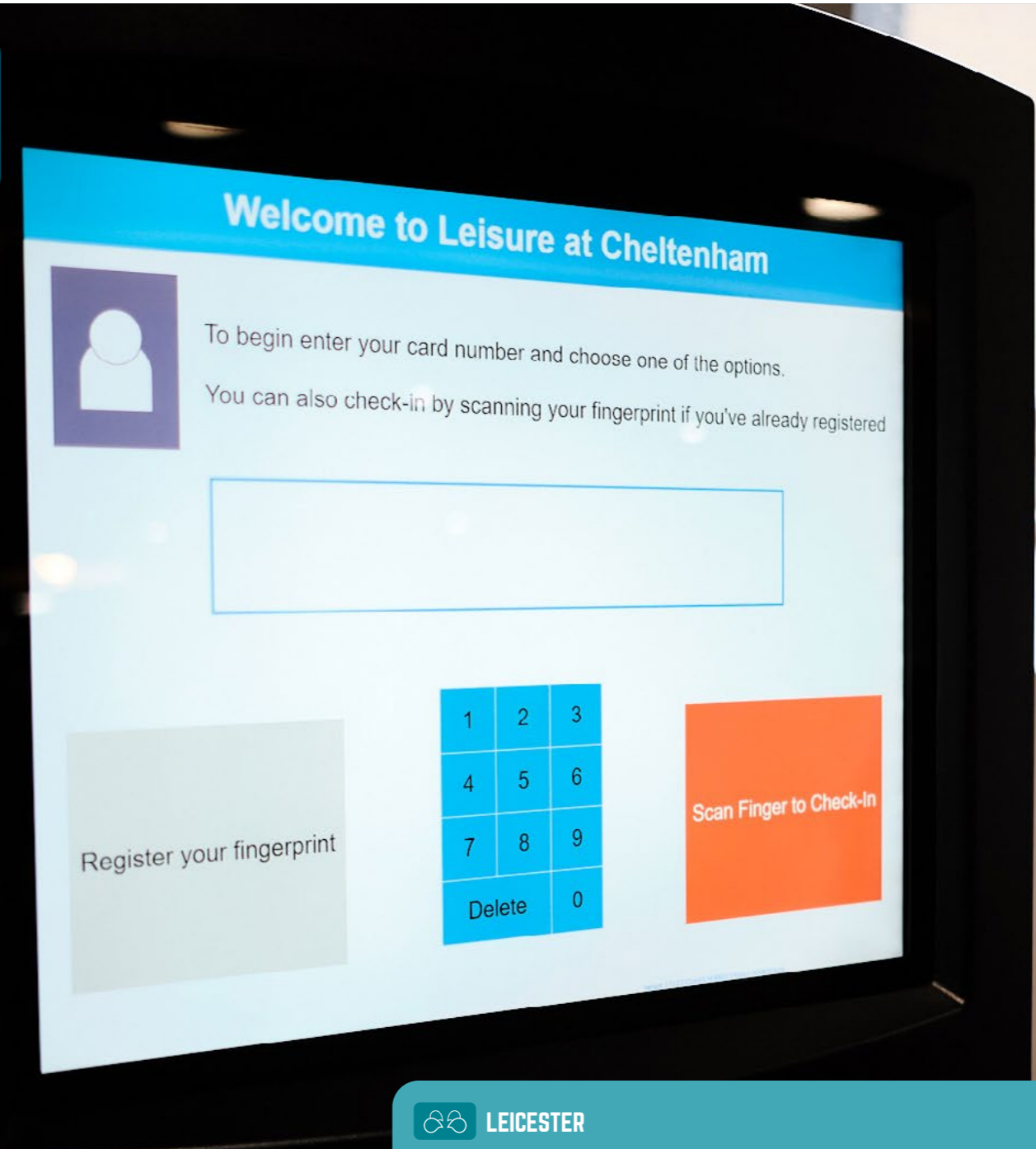
The pilots mainly used their existing customer records management (CRM) systems to capture customer’s demographic and contact details, as well as the types of pool-based activity they were doing.

Most of those who explored technical upgrades such as new software, entrance barriers or kiosks for reception areas generally found that it was not possible to resolve the IT issues around making these operational within the relatively short timescale of the pilot.

## CHELTENHAM

As part of a bigger redevelopment of the leisure centre Cheltenham installed a fast-track kiosk at the entry point to the pool area. Members can log themselves in and casual users can book their entry ticket for specific activities, such as the children’s Splash Pad area.

The entry gates are operated by fingerprints – registered to members and pay-as-you-go customers who have signed up for a free **Leisure Access** membership (which requires them to share their address, age, gender and contact details).



## LEICESTER

Compatibility and IT issues meant **Swim Leicester** shelved their original idea of installing kiosks in pool receptions where customers could log-in. Instead they opted for a mix of tablets and entry gates. Although frustrating, working through this process did make Swim Leicester explore the robustness of their data, the value of good data, and the best way to capture what they need.

# BETTER CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The Swim Pilots focused on making better use of their existing CRM systems and improving the reliability of the customer data they were capturing.

They explored their **system's capabilities**, trained staff in **good data entry** practices, and ensured they were routinely **collecting customers' contact details**.

**DURHAM**

Durham estimated £85 of income was lost every time staff missed the opportunity to capture a customer's email address. After they pointed out that some staff had 'cost' the pool £20,000 of income by failing to input customer emails the proportion of records without an email address fell from a quarter to just a tenth.



**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

Amalgamated after the merging of three separate trusts, Brio's database holds a vast amount of information formatted in three different ways. Brio realised that cleaning this data and upgrading to more flexible CRM software was too big a task to achieve in one year. As a first step they focused on training new and existing staff in accurate customer data entry, and on reprogramming their current system to draw out more insightful reports.

# CAPTURING CASUAL USER INFORMATION

Some pilots introduced **reward cards** for casual users, so customers got discounts and incentives in exchange for sharing their details and logging each visit to the pool.

These cards could be leisure centre specific, or linked to the authority's wider leisure and culture offer.

## DURHAM

Thrive cards were given free to casual swimmers in **Durham**, whose details were recorded as part of the sign up processes. Normally costing £5 per year, the cardholder is entitled to discounts on swimming activities, as well as across Durham's culture and sports offer.


## NORTH TYNESIDE

Senior swimmers wanting to take advantage of **Free Swim Fridays** had to sign up for an Ease Card. This was free (usually £3.60 or more) and gave them free swims, as well as membership of (and discounts at) all **North Tyneside's** leisure centres and libraries. Staff could then track all their visits to the pool – for free swims and other sessions too.



# CAPTURING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

 **18 percentage point increase** Staff members thinking Active Luton listens to what its customers have to say.\*

 **SEFTON**

“If you’re making changes then it’s completely justified to ask what isn’t right – provided you definitely then address the issues.”

The Swim Local pilots started to proactively collect customer feedback – to see how the changes they were making were being received, and to gather ideas on further improvements they could make.

Some used comment cards or kiosks in reception to capture feedback as people left the pool, while others emailed customers after their visit. Some specifically started to measure and track their Net Promoter Score.

Providers instigated new internal procedures to make sure feedback was reviewed by managers and then acted on.

They used positive comments to boost staff moral, and adjusted their mindsets to view complaints as helpful feedback.

By turning complaints in to action points both customer and staff moral improved, as they could see that problems were being proactively addressed.

\*Active Luton data.

 **COVENTRY**

At Xcel Leisure Centre 5\* comment cards are given to customers at the end of their visit so they can rate customer service, facilities and cleanliness on a five point scale. At the end of the week GoSwim collates the results in to a graph, which is shared with staff as a snapshot of their performance.



# MYSTERY SHOPPERS

Some of the Swim Local pilots recruited *mystery shoppers* to help them assess the impact of the changes they made.

 DURHAM

“Mystery shoppers were the best tool for feeding back on staff performance. Self assessment didn’t work – as some staff perceive their performance to be better than it is!”

 CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

Brio recruited 25 volunteer **undercover secret agents** via Facebook. Some were existing members but most were new customers. In return for a free swim membership the agents visited pools and completed monthly surveys about their experiences.



# SMARTER USE OF DATA

Once they had collected customer data and feedback the Swim Pilots tried to become more effective at using it to inform their decision-making.

They explored their systems' **reporting capabilities**, made **time for analysis** and **used the insight** it gave them in their operational decision-making.

 COVENTRY

“It isn’t enough to gather data in isolation; it is crucial that staff **react** to the findings.”

 LEICESTER

Realising the importance of having robust data and using it well, **Swim Leicester** has created a new staff position with responsibility for insight and communications.

 CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

**Brio** have specifically allocated on-going staff time for data analysis, so they can continue to use site-specific customer insight when making operational decisions.



# GET STARTED WITH OUR LEARNING LOCKER



Be inspired and learn more about making your pool relevant and accountable to the local community with these downloads from our learning locker

- Download the Sefton **CASE STUDY** on being relevant and accountable

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- Download the Northumberland **CASE STUDY** on their Take the Plunge card

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- Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on being relevant and accountable

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for collecting customer insight, data and feedback



## DEEP END

# MODERNISING THE SWIMMING OFFER

DRfighter  
AQUATIC EQUIPMENT

# MODERNISED SWIMMING OFFER

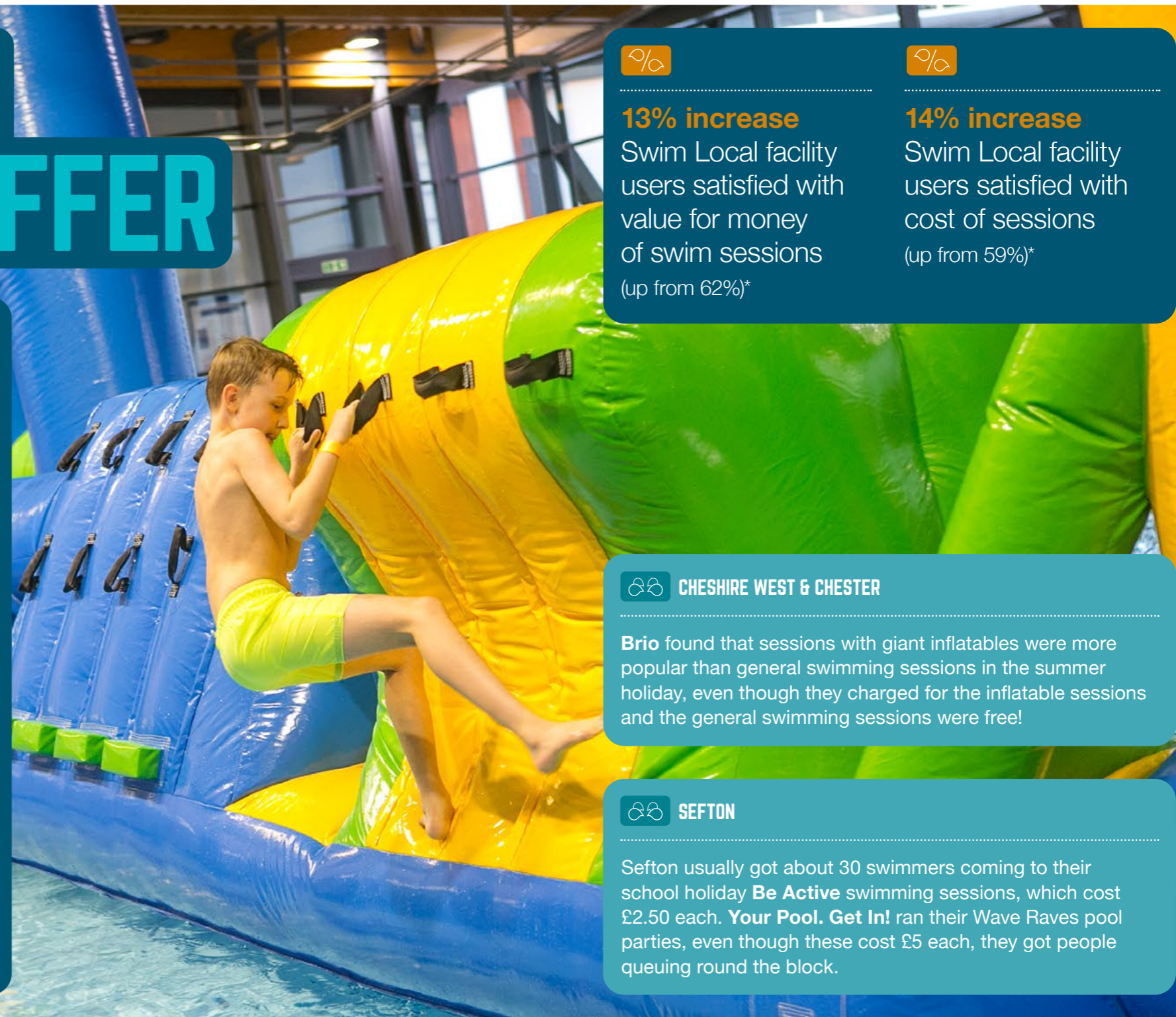
The Swim Pilots broadened from 'lessons and lanes' to using the pool as an **activity space** hosting a wider variety of regular sessions and classes, as well as special events. Activities often included elements to make them more 'experiential', like music and mood lighting, or time to socialise with food or drink.

By offering a more diverse programme of activities in their pools the pilots aimed to appeal to a wider array of people, especially those who may have previously thought that swimming just wasn't for them.

They also wanted to provide activities that varied in the type, level and intensity of activity so there was a progression pathway they could use to encourage people on to 'the next level' – to motivate them to improve their skills and confidence.

The pilots also wanted to improve the local communities' perceptions of value for money – offering activities and added extras that would make getting in the water worth it, despite the cost and 'hassle factor'.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



**13% increase**

Swim Local facility users satisfied with value for money of swim sessions (up from 62%)\*



**14% increase**

Swim Local facility users satisfied with cost of sessions (up from 59%)\*



**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

Brio found that sessions with giant inflatables were more popular than general swimming sessions in the summer holiday, even though they charged for the inflatable sessions and the general swimming sessions were free!



**SEFTON**

Sefton usually got about 30 swimmers coming to their school holiday **Be Active** swimming sessions, which cost £2.50 each. **Your Pool. Get In!** ran their Wave Raves pool parties, even though these cost £5 each, they got people queuing round the block.

## LEARNING LOCKER

Download the **LUTON CASE STUDY** on modernising the swimming offer  
 Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on modernising the swimming offer  
 Download our **TOP TIPS** for modernising the swimming offer



# NEW SESSIONS & CLASSES



The Swim Pilots reorganised their pool timetables to free up time when they could provide pool-based activities that would appeal to their target audiences, at the times of the day it would most convenient for them to get to.

In to this time they introduced a huge array of new swimming sessions and aquatic classes. Typically, the new sessions did one or more of these:

- Offered core target audiences a greater variety of aquatic activity, to keep them motivated and interested. For example, families might be able to opt for a **Splash & Swim** fun session, join a toddler **Swimasong**, or tackle giant inflatables at a **Gladiator** style session.
- Turned the pool in to an extension of the gym, with group fitness classes in the water. Offering a range of types and intensities of exercise, from **Aqua Yoga** to **Hydro HIT**.
- Provided pool time for certain types of people, who might need specific support, facilities or conditions. Such as women from BAME groups that need privacy, or people with a health condition or learning impairment that require a quieter, calmer ambiance.
- Provided pool time for certain types of swimmer, who might need specific support. Such as adult non-swimmers who needed **Tip Your Toe** introductory session, or competent swimmers who wanted the challenge of **Swim Faster** training.

Some pilots simply renamed their existing sessions to make it clearer what they were and who they were for. So a public swim may have become **Swimming for All**, while lane swimming became **Swim for Fitness**

# GROUP FITNESS CLASSES

Group fitness classes in the pool, such as Aqua Fit and Hydro Pole, were especially popular. Gym users in particular enjoyed the variation they brought to their gym routine. Some pilots capitalised on this and fully integrated the pool in to their gym and fitness offer.



# INTEGRATING SWIM & GYM

To entice more of ‘the gym crowd’ into the water pilots increased the visibility of their pool to gym users, by putting up promotional materials about the pool in reception and the gym; often using digital screens to ensure these were dynamic and eye-catching.



## 🏊 SALFORD

Salford used their **Swim After Gym** marketing around their leisure centres to remind gym users that their membership entitled them to swim for free. They also added the pool in to their gym induction process – so the link between the two was built in to new users’ perception of the leisure centre from their very first visit.

## 🏊 DURHAM

The new schedule of aqua classes in **Durham** led to attendance almost doubling (an extra 2,160 visits per month on average) and to a 26% increase in participants (an extra 115 people per month on average).\* Of these people getting more active, more often, some couldn’t even swim!

\* Durham County Council data.






Some pilot's gym members already had the pool included in their memberships and just needed to be encouraged to use it.

In other places pilots introduced combined **swim and gym memberships** so gym users could swim or take part in pool-based classes at no extra cost. They also tweaked timings to create **complementary pool and gym timetables**.

In some pilots the wet-side staff went in to the gym to **talk to gym users** about the fitness benefits of swimming and how to best integrate it in to their fitness regime. Other pilots capitalised on the existing relationship between gym users and staff, **training gym staff to sell the fitness benefits of swimming and to deliver aquatic fitness classes**. That way gym users venturing to the pool would see staff they already trusted.

 **NORTHUMBERLAND**

**Take the Plunge** introduced a new 'gym + swim + classes' membership, so their fitness-focused customers could use a variety of all three, to keep their fitness routine fresh.

They made training to deliver lower impact water-based sessions part of dry-side instructors' CPD – so they were trained to deliver **Aqua Pole & Float Fit** classes.

# ADULT NON-SWIMMERS



**Getting adult non-swimmers into their pools meant the Pilots got people swimming who literally had not been able to before.**

They offered **adult swimming lessons**, confidence-building sessions and ran special events for non-swimmers – often targeting these at specific groups such as young parents or older people.

## 🏊 SOUTH SOMERSET

LED developed an adult learn to swim programme with four levels. They ranged from **Dip Your Toe: 1: Confidence Restored** which started with swimmers submerging themselves and floating, to **Dip Your Toe 4: You Can Swim The Distance** where swimmers completed 25m front crawl, 50m backstroke and breaststroke, and 10m butterfly.

Swimmers received a certificate when they completed each stage, and afterwards could progress on to **Learn More** – intermediate adult sessions.

## 🏊 SOUTH SOMERSET

“Paul was shaking with fear when he started **Dip Your Toe**. We were delighted when five months later he sent us a picture of himself, enjoying the pool while on holiday with his grandchildren.”

## 🏊 COVENTRY

Coventry held free **Big Paddle** events to tempt people into the pool. They raised the floor of their pool so people who’d never been in a pool before could come along in shorts and t-shirts to dip their toe in and paddle around in knee-height water. There was tea and cake afterwards, and everyone was awarded a certificate to celebrate overcoming their initial fears.

Over their cuppa staff encouraged people to come along to other suitable sessions or lessons, so all 16 people who took part then started coming to **Learn to Swim** sessions.

Coventry now hold a **Big Paddle** several times a year, to attract a new group of novice swimmers.



# HOSTING SPECIAL EVENTS



The pilots also used their pools to host special events such as pool parties and fundays; where people could have fun, water-based experiences.

These were often so popular the pilots had to instigate pre-booking policies. Themed **Wave Rave** pool parties were particularly successful; with the pool water dyed shocking colours, loud music and staff in fancy dress. For some themes, like Disney or Christmas, the fun in the pool was followed by a film screening with popcorn and drinks.

**SALFORD**

**Your Pool. Get In!** dyed their pool green like grass for their **World Cup Pool Party**. Swimmers could play with inflatable footballs and water pistols. For their **Ibiza Pool Party** they dyed the pool pink, and swimmers played with inflatable flamingos and lilos while listening to dance music.

**COVENTRY**

**Go Swim** used their pool hall as a cultural space. They hosted a photography exhibition on the poolside, and suspending a giant model of the moon over the pool for their **Moonlight Swim** party.

# MAKING IT SOCIAL



CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER  
 “Food brings people in!”

**The pilots built in a social element to many of their classes, sessions and events; often offering food and drink as part of this.**

Bringing customers together socially built groups that supported each other and encouraged regular attendance. It also gave staff time to talk to customers about other classes and sessions that might help them progress.

Sometimes it provided a chance for people that may be socially isolated to chat to a friendly face, or for free or affordable meals to be given to people on low incomes. In other cases it just made sense to offer food as part of creating an **experience**, or because a session was at a time of day when someone might want to eat or drink something.

**VARIOUS**

**Hambleton** offers tea and coffee to people taking part in their 50+ social swim sessions – helping to reduce the loneliness and social isolation that can be common in older people.

**Coventry** run **Cereal Swimmers** – a morning lane swim where swimmers are offered breakfast afterwards.

**Salford** offers tea and coffee after **Discovery Duckings** parent and child sessions – so parents get the chance to chat together and the kids to play.

**Leicester** installed a vending machine so bleary-eyed parents bringing their kids in for early morning swim training could wake up with a tea or coffee.

**South Somerset** created a **coffee pod** area in reception, where customers can socialise after they’ve been in the pool.

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

**Brio Leisure** offer a **Pool & Fuel** deal for parents and children – pay for to swim and for just £1.50 extra get sandwich, salad or hot meal and drink afterwards.

They also got a local charity to fund the lunch offered after free summer holiday swimming sessions for low income families.

**Jump to SOCIAL VALUE** to read more about introducing a social element

# REVISED PRICING & OPENING HOURS

To make visiting the pool more affordable some of the pilots revised their pricing. Some brought in new swim-only memberships, so dedicated pool users weren't paying for gym access they didn't want.

Others rolled out combined swim and gym memberships that included studio and pool fitness classes – to provide good value, all-inclusive access. One introduced a new student membership rate.

A few pilots extended their opening hours – so they could offer sessions at times that better suited their customers. In particular, offering earlier morning sessions and longer hours on the weekend.



## 🔄 VARIOUS

When **Leicester** introduced its new swim-only membership 300 people signed up for it in the first month.

When they opened new facilities or classes **Durham** offered a 25% discount on membership, to encourage casual users whose interest had been piqued to become regular users.

**Hambleton** started opening earlier in the week to meet demand from female swimmers. They also extended their opening times in the summer to attract more families looking for a school holiday activity.

# MOTIVATIONAL AIDS



Credit: SwimTag

The pilots trialled a range of motivational aids to keep pool users engaged and having fun, especially if they were lane swimming. Some pools offered SwimTag wristbands or Swim Fit cards, so swimmers could better monitor their activity and improve their fitness.

Others introduced challenges to persuade swimmers to stretch themselves, or purchased training equipment such as floats, fins, aqua mitts and training mirrors.

Some got new play equipment such as inflatables, zorbes, slides and rafts.

## VARIOUS

More than 400 people took part in Hambleton's Swim The Lakes monthly SwimTag challenge. Starting in May with Derwent Water (184 lengths) swimmers used the wristbands to log their progress swimming the length of one of the Lake District's famous lakes. Tackled in length order, by December they were swimming 723 lengths to cover the 11.2 miles of Lake Windermere.

Swimmers' progress was displayed on digital leaderboards in the reception areas of their four pools, and they went in to a draw for a swimming goody bag. One lady was so determined she used a spreadsheet to calculate when she should swim each week and how many lengths she needed to do each time in order to meet the challenge!

## HAMBLETON SWIMMER

"I love using SwimTag. I used to swim once or twice a week and do around 30 - 40 lengths per swim. I now do at least 50 lengths and go to the pool two or three times a week.

SwimTag lets me see the progress I am making in speed, distance and the amount of rest during each swim. The Lakes challenge has been really motivating. On dark, cold mornings it can be difficult to push yourself to go for a swim, but having a target to achieve before the end of the month has given me that extra push to go. And I always feel great afterwards!"



# POOLSIDE HELP

Crucially the pilots employed **poolside helpers, or activators**, to run new classes and facilitate sessions – providing customers with advice, support and motivation from the poolside.

This included:

- Supporting new customers, such as with where to put their towel or how to safely enter the pool
- Providing tips on swimming technique
- Encouraging good pool etiquette
- Advising people of other classes and sessions they might like to try

 [Jump to CUSTOMER JOURNEY](#) to find out more about activators 



# GET STARTED WITH OUR LEARNING LOCKER



Be inspired and learn more about modernising the swimming offer with these downloads from our Learning Locker.

- Download the **DEEP DIVE** on pool sessions and classes

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- Download the Luton **CASE STUDY** on modernising the swimming offer

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- Download the North Tyneside **CASE STUDY** on their universal health offer

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- Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on modernising the swimming offer

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for modernising the swimming offer

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for targeting adult non-swimmers



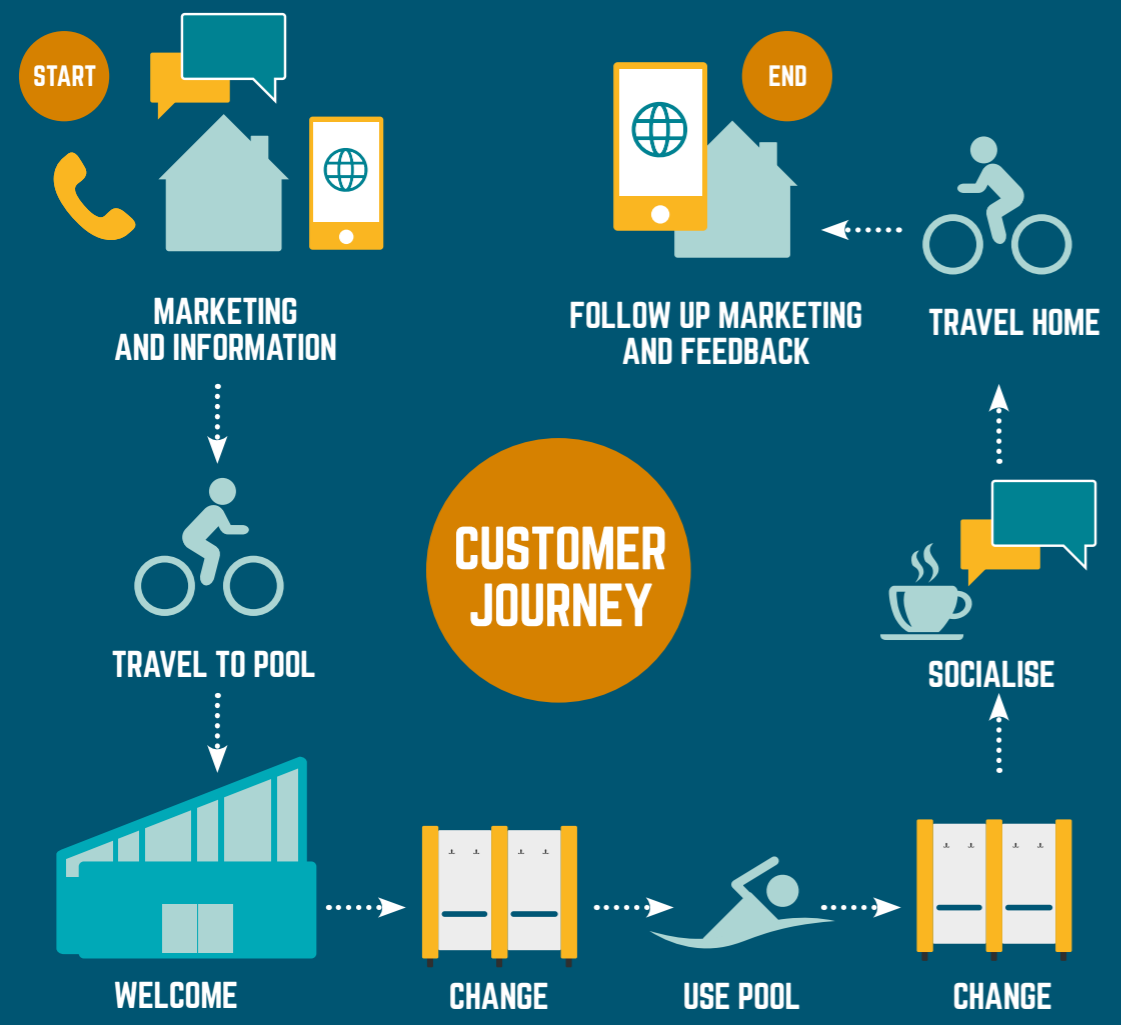
## DEEP END

# PERFECTING THE END-TO-END CUSTOMER JOURNEY

ADAMIC  
PDACH

# PERFECTING THE END-TO-END CUSTOMER JOURNEY

**10% increase** Customer satisfaction with overall experience at Swim Local pools (up from 72%)\*



**The Swim Pilots aimed to give their customers great customer experiences.**

Starting when they were at home contemplating a trip to the pool, or meeting an activator out and about in the community – through to follow-up marketing and surveys.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



Providers know that their pools are competing as a **fitness centre** with local private gyms, and sometimes gym facilities within the same leisure centre.

So they thought about how to improve **customer service** and **facilities**, to bring the pool in line with modern expectations of the fitness industry.

At the same time they used their insight to understand the barriers, needs and preferences of their target audiences, and thought about how to make their visit more **experiential**.

The Swim Pilots then factored all this in to their plans to create an **organisational culture** dedicated to delivering great customer experiences; as well as to their ideas for improving facilities to create a **clean, pleasant** and **hassle-free** attraction.

The pilots also improved the customer journey by providing better information; demystifying the pool for new customers; modernising their swimming offer; and providing a more sociable range of activities. These are all discussed in other Deep End sections.

 [Jump to COMMUNITY OUTREACH to find out more](#) 

 [Jump to SWIMMING OFFER to find out more](#) 

# PLEASANT & USER-FRIENDLY FACILITIES

The Swim Pilots looked at how they could improve their facilities to make life easier for their customers; as well as to create a more enjoyable place for people to exercise and have fun.

Depending on what each pool had already, these could be anything from **small improvements** to more significant **refurbishments**.

Changing rooms and the poolside were the focus of improvements, but the Swim Pilots also looked at how they could improve **all** the spaces customers pass through.

The Swim Local Pilots found that **small changes** – such as poolside pegs or more powerful hairdryers – could make a **big difference** to customers. When a number of small changes were made together they felt the impact was greater than the sum of the parts.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.

 NORTHALLERTON LEISURE CENTRE CUSTOMER

“The pool and changing village are brilliant – thrilled with the improvements!”



%

**14% increase** Customer satisfaction with Swim Local facilities

(up from 72%) compared to 6% decline nationally (down from 70%)\*

# HASSLE-FREE CHANGING

Changing areas can have a huge influence on perceptions of a facility, and are where the **hassle** of swimming is most evident.

So the Swim Pilots particularly tried to make changing areas more pleasant and easy to use.

Some pools **refurbished** changing rooms and made them more **user friendly**; especially for families and disabled people. Sometimes improvements included **toilets or shower areas**; in particular introducing more private showers.

Some pilots upgraded **lockers**; even making them free to use in some cases.

Others improved **vanity areas**. In particular installing more powerful **hairdryers** or plugs for customers bringing straighteners.

A few pilots installed **costume dryers**. Some had wanted to install **body dryers**, but found these prohibitively expensive.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.

## LEICESTER

Aside from modernised toilets, showers and sauna the revamped changing area at **Cossington Street Sports Centre** now has a seat in every cubicle and a vanity area with free-to-use hairdryers.

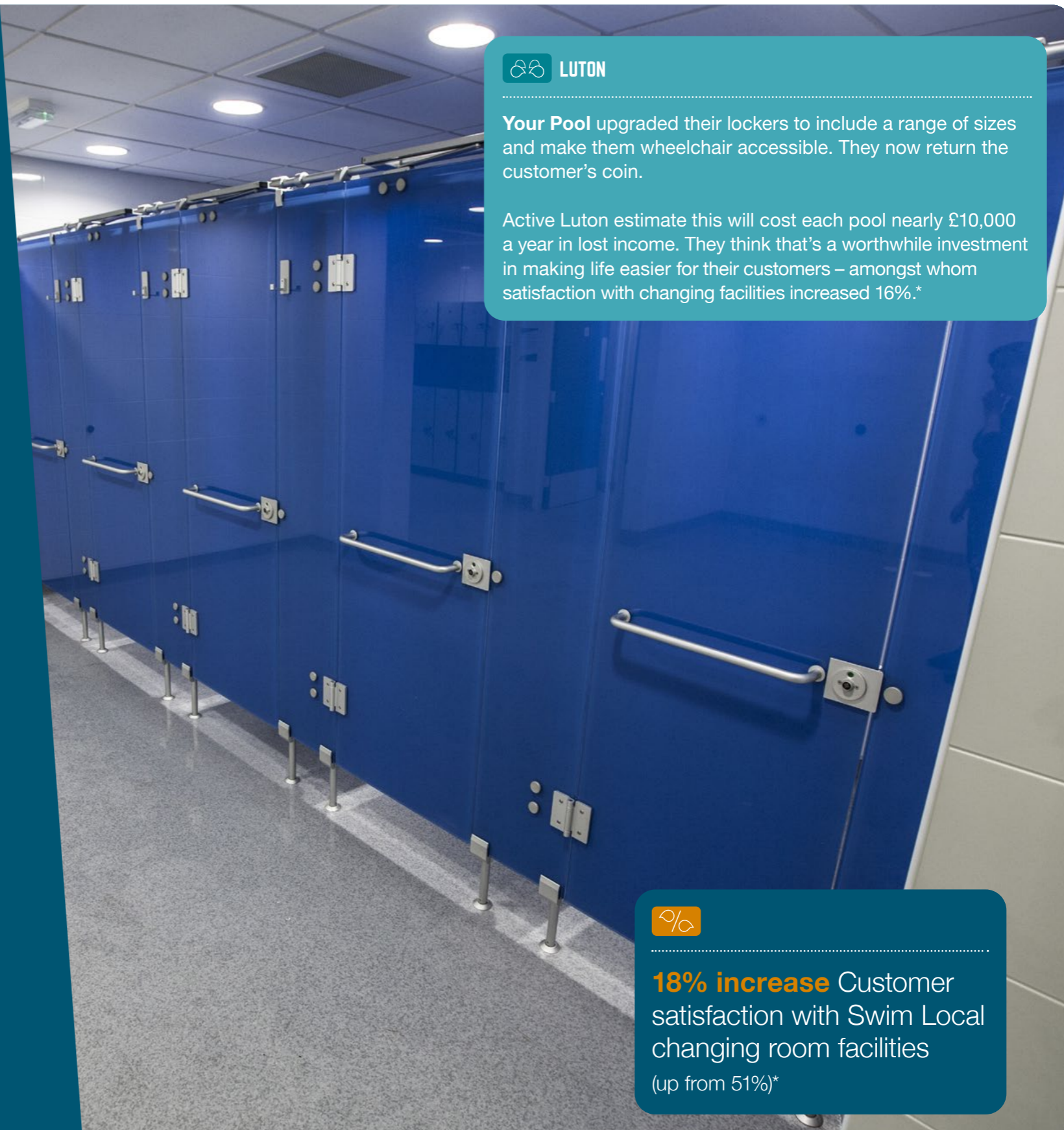
## LUTON

**Your Pool** upgraded their lockers to include a range of sizes and make them wheelchair accessible. They now return the customer's coin.

Active Luton estimate this will cost each pool nearly £10,000 a year in lost income. They think that's a worthwhile investment in making life easier for their customers – amongst whom satisfaction with changing facilities increased 16%.\*

9%

**18% increase** Customer satisfaction with Swim Local changing room facilities (up from 51%)\*



# REFRESHING THE POOLSIDE

A lot of Swim Pilots also thought about how to make life easier for customers in the pool hall.

They put up **pegs** or **storage** cubbies for things people want to keep to hand (like glasses and shower gel), put in **seating**, and installed **water fountains** to keep customers hydrated.

At other pools providers installed **sound systems** or more atmospheric **lighting**, so they could change the ambiance for different activities – from calming whale music for a relaxing session, to pumping dance tunes for a pool party.

A number of Swim Pilots brought their new branding in to the pool hall – putting up dynamic and motivational **signs**. Others refreshed their **instructional signage** to make it more positive in tone.

A few pools got an instant refresh with a new **pool liner**, or put in **privacy blinds** to use during single-gender sessions. Some got **pool pods** or **accessible steps**, to help less able customers get in the pool.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.

## THIS GIRL CAN SWIM

Pools installed pegs, or put out baskets, on the poolside – so female swimmers who were body-conscious had somewhere to put the towel or gown they used to cover-up with between the changing area and pool.

**16% increase** Customer satisfaction with poolside atmosphere at Swim Local pools (up from 56%)\*



## LEICESTER

“We had to tell customers what the poolside cubbies were for – they thought it was modern art!”



# GETTING AROUND & GETTING COMFY

A number of Swim Pilots upgraded other parts of the leisure centre to enhance customers' experiences before and after their swim.

Several pools had their **reception areas** refurbished, to make them more welcoming and efficient at processing customers as they arrive.

A lot of pools decluttered and refreshed **internal directional signs**, in some cases branding them or making them more inclusive (e.g. dementia-friendly).

To encourage socialising and longer dwell times after getting out of the pool – and to maximise secondary income from refreshments – a number of Swim Pilots invested in new or improved **viewing galleries, seating or cafe areas**. They sometimes made these more **child-friendly**, with high chairs, play pens and soft play equipment.

One pilot even expanded their car park to address customers' complaints about **accessibility**. A couple explored the idea of a **swim minibus** to bring in less able and low-income customers but found they couldn't resolve cost, health and safety and driver training issues in time.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



**14% increase** Customer satisfaction with non-sport facilities at Swim Local pools (up from 50%)\*

**SOUTH SOMERSET**  
Customers at Wincanton Sports Centre can settle down on the new cafe style seating and help themselves to a drink from the **Coffee Pod** refreshment stand. **LED** think this would have been a more popular new addition if it was staffed rather than self-service – as it would help make stopping for a coffee feel like even more of a relaxing and indulgent post-exercise treat.

# CLEANLINESS

The Swim Pilots improved their cleaning regimes and made cleaning more visible, in recognition of the fact that cleanliness is a major driver of customer satisfaction at pools.

They updated cleaning **procedures** and **schedules**, and made sure these were on display to customers. Some purchased new **cleaning equipment** or started using more robust **cleaning products**.

Some pools increased the **intensity** and **frequency** of cleaning; even employing dedicated **cleaning staff** to keep on top of things at peak times.

A few pilots introduced compulsory **blue shoe** or **no outdoor shoes** policies in their changing rooms.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



## NORTHUMBERLAND

Customers are happier with cleanliness now **Take the Plunge** has enforced a **no outdoor shoes** policy in changing rooms. They also feel good about doing their bit for the environment as they no longer need blue shoe covers – a single-use plastic.



**10% increase** Customer satisfaction with cleanliness at Swim Local pools (up from 58%)\*



Meet Nick and find out more about how Northumberland improved cleanliness on YouTube



# PERCEPTIONS OF CLEANLINESS

The pilots realised that irrespective of how clean their facilities actually were, customers needed to **perceive** them as clean – especially their changing rooms.

This is why making cleaning more **visible** was important – for example by displaying cleaning schedules in clip frames, putting more bins out or having cleaning staff wear branded uniforms.

The pilots realised that sometimes it was difficult to improve satisfaction with cleanliness, because where facilities were out-dated customers simply tended to perceive **old** as synonymous with **unclean**.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.



**16% increase** Satisfaction with changing area cleanliness at Swim Local pools (up from 50%)\*

**DURHAM**  
 “It’s important not only that facilities **are** clean, but that they **feel** clean.”

**SALFORD**  
 Perceptions of cleanliness changed instantly at **Worsley Leisure Centre** when the existing warm yellow lighting was switched to bright white LEDs.

# GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE

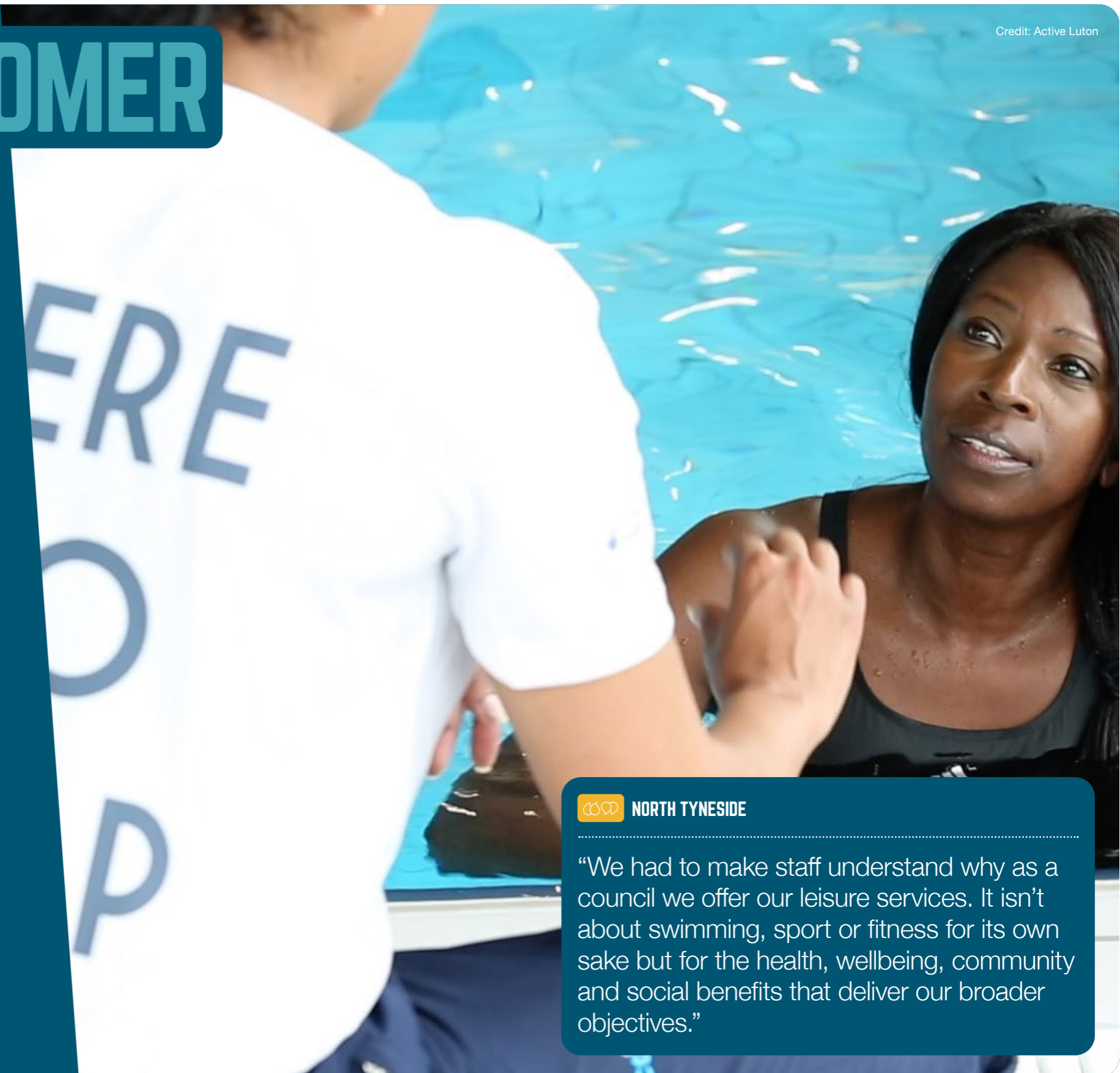
The Swim Pilots knew their staff were absolutely key to providing great customer experiences.

So they dedicated a lot of time and effort to ensuring they had the **right staff**, with the **right attitude** and **skills**, both front of house and behind the scenes; and began to build teams that were dedicated to delivering great customer service and delighting their customers.

To **empower** staff the Swim Pilots engaged them in the swimming transformation process and took time to explain their role in it.

The Swim Pilots **trained staff** to give them the skills, knowledge and behaviours they would need to deliver excellence; and put in place **performance management** processes to support continuous improvement.

They created key new **activator** roles, and began to prioritise local knowledge, attitude and personality when **recruiting staff**.



Credit: Active Luton

**NORTH TYNESIDE**

“We had to make staff understand why as a council we offer our leisure services. It isn’t about swimming, sport or fitness for its own sake but for the health, wellbeing, community and social benefits that deliver our broader objectives.”



# STAFF TRAINING

Every Swim Local Pilot ran training to ensure their staff had the **skills and confidence** to deliver great customer experiences.

Often their entire workforce took part, whether or not they had direct day-to-day contact with customers; including senior managers who were expected to then lead by example.

Training focused on **customer service** but included other elements such as positive staff relationships, ‘healthy conversations’, sales skills or product knowledge. It was particularly well received when the training company delivered training tailored specifically to the leisure sector.

Many Swim Pilots also provided **aquatics training** for gym and poolside staff to deliver the new activities on offer in the pool. For example, in higher level swim teaching qualification, as instructors for specific classes or through Swim England’s Aquatic Activity for Health qualification.

Depending on the needs of their target audiences, current capabilities and the scope of their interventions to transform swimming, pilots also sent their staff on **other training** as necessary.

## EVERYONE ACTIVE

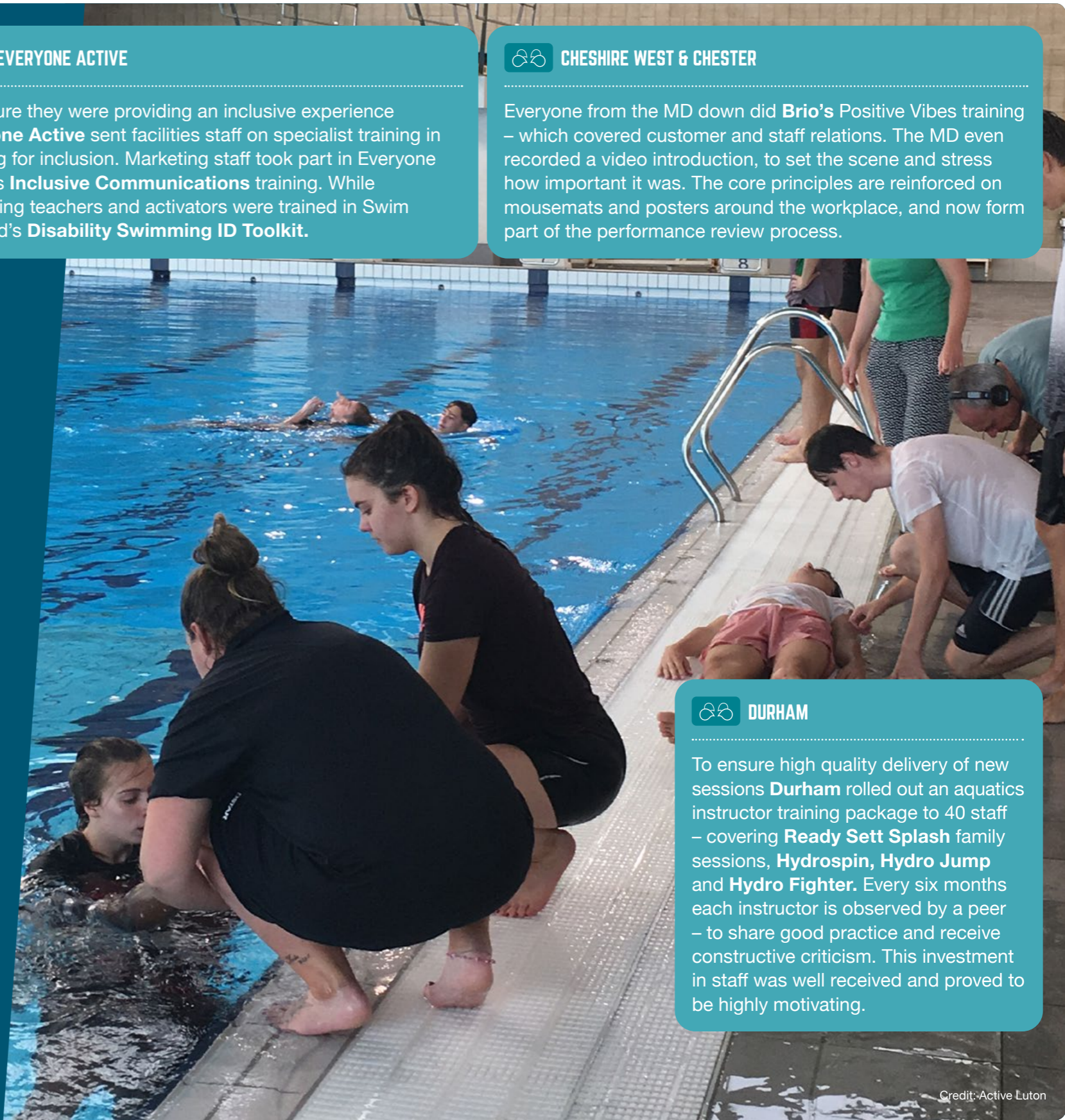
To ensure they were providing an inclusive experience **Everyone Active** sent facilities staff on specialist training in auditing for inclusion. Marketing staff took part in Everyone Active’s **Inclusive Communications** training. While swimming teachers and activators were trained in Swim England’s **Disability Swimming ID Toolkit**.

## CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

Everyone from the MD down did **Brio’s Positive Vibes** training – which covered customer and staff relations. The MD even recorded a video introduction, to set the scene and stress how important it was. The core principles are reinforced on mousemats and posters around the workplace, and now form part of the performance review process.

## DURHAM

To ensure high quality delivery of new sessions **Durham** rolled out an aquatics instructor training package to 40 staff – covering **Ready Sett Splash** family sessions, **Hydrospin**, **Hydro Jump** and **Hydro Fighter**. Every six months each instructor is observed by a peer – to share good practice and receive constructive criticism. This investment in staff was well received and proved to be highly motivating.



# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Many staff training schemes included a **train the trainer** element – involving staff who were positive role models – so they would be able to do follow-up training as necessary, and train new staff during their inductions.

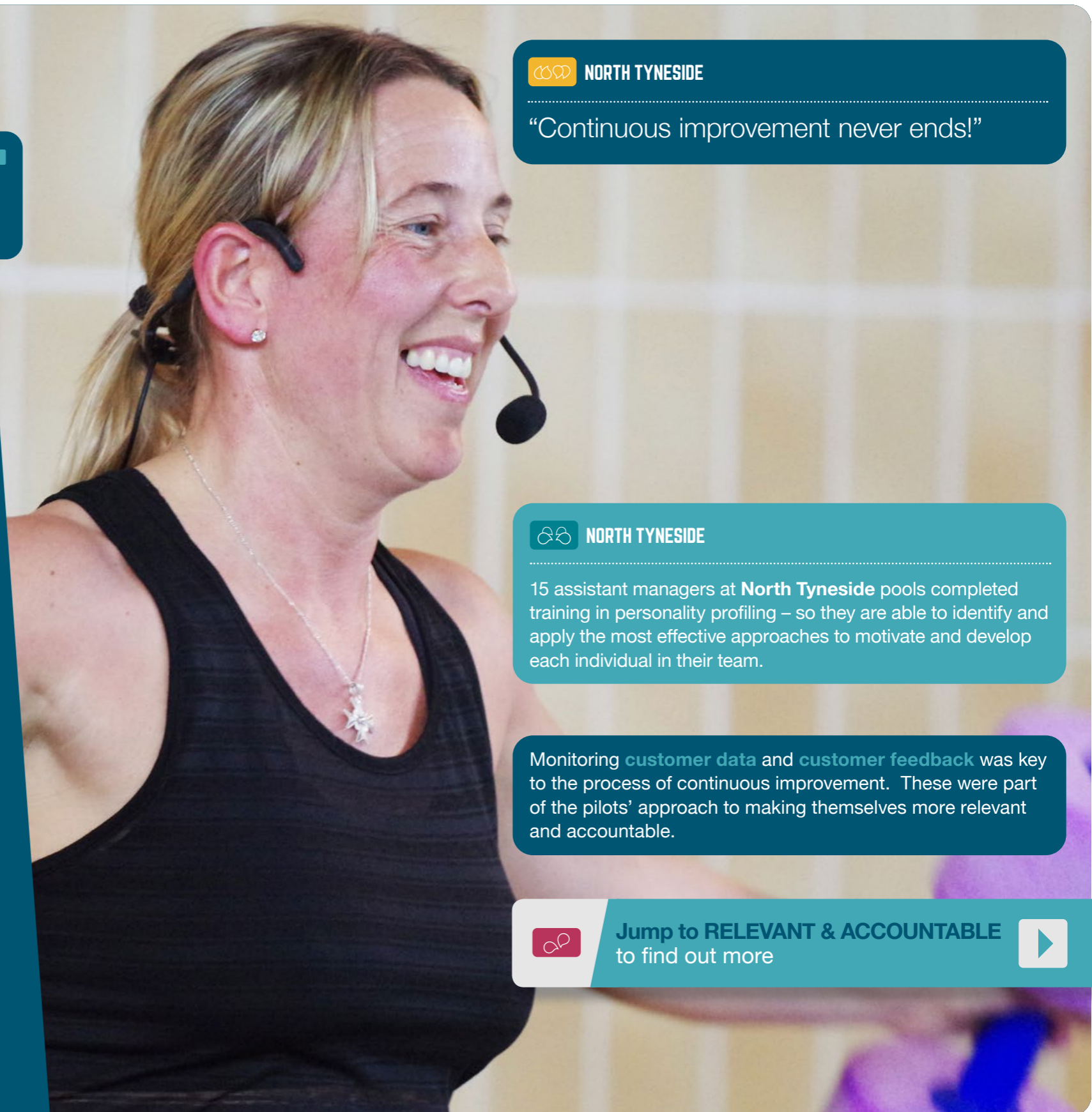
This mainstreaming of training was a key legacy of the Swim Local pilot, along with the embedding of **on-going monitoring of staff performance** – to create a culture of continuous improvement in customer service.

Some pilots reinforced their training by developing a **customer charter** or set of **staff values** for customer service. These became useful principles guiding day-to-day delivery.

Others specifically included **performance management** in their staff training, or embedded customer service principles in their **staff development frameworks**.

## CHELTENHAM

Developing a customer charter started a dialogue with **Leisure at Cheltenham** staff about how to deliver this, and got them identifying their own training needs.



## NORTH TYNESIDE

“Continuous improvement never ends!”

## NORTH TYNESIDE

15 assistant managers at **North Tyneside** pools completed training in personality profiling – so they are able to identify and apply the most effective approaches to motivate and develop each individual in their team.

Monitoring **customer data** and **customer feedback** was key to the process of continuous improvement. These were part of the pilots’ approach to making themselves more relevant and accountable.



**Jump to RELEVANT & ACCOUNTABLE** to find out more



# RECRUITING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

## NORTHUMBERLAND

“You don’t just need the right qualifications to teach new classes – you need the right personality too. It’s best to find an “I’m rock star – come to my class – it’s not to be missed!” personality and then train them up.”

The Swim Pilots sometimes recruited additional staff to resource their swimming transformation – such as lifeguards, swim teachers and activators (who you can read more about later in this section).

With these new positions, and when replacing staff in existing posts, the Swim Pilots realised it was more important to recruit people with the **right personality, attitude and values**, than the right qualifications. They figured a person could be trained in qualifications or knowledge, but wouldn’t suddenly adopt a more personable manner or can-do attitude.

## SALFORD

The interview process for **Swim Your Way’s** activators included having to draw four key aspects of their life in a shield. This tested how they reacted to an unexpected task, and gave the recruiters a springboard in to discussing candidates’ passions and motivations.

## LEICESTER

**Active Leicester** used a **recruit to train** approach to develop 28 new swim teachers. They used a marketing campaign to attract interest and group activities to find the right personalities. Successful candidates were then trained for free provided they committed to working for at least 6 hours a week for a year after qualifying.



# BUILDING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Some Pilots also realised the value of having a more **diverse workforce**, and tried to recruit people who were representative of the socio-demographics of the local community – and in particular of the specific target audiences they were trying to attract to the pool.

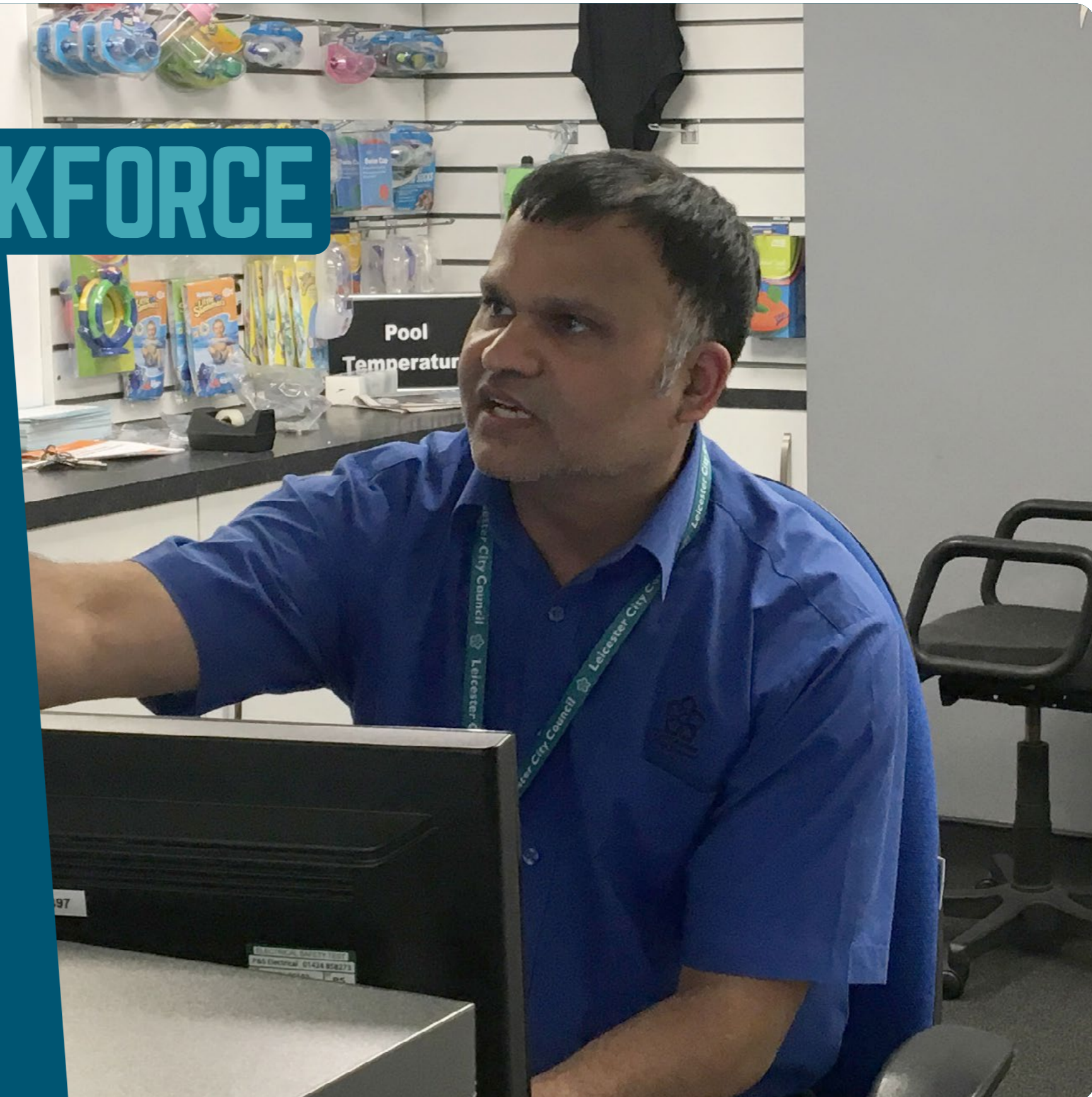
Some thought about how to tailor new positions to appeal to local people. For example by making them less than 16 hours so they would not affect people's eligibility for benefits.

A few Swim Pilots welcomed **volunteers** in to their staff team. As these were usually from the local area they helped the leisure centre better understand local customers, and also helped to make it more representative of the local community.



LUTON

**Your Pool** trained 20 new BAME staff in the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification – so customers would see a broader range of ‘people like me’ when they came to the pool.



# HAPPIER STAFF, HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

All of this investment in workforce development helped to create a more positive working environment and happier staff.

This created a better atmosphere in the leisure centre – which had a knock on effect for customers – helping to further improve their customer experience.



 **HAMBLETON AQUATICS OFFICER**

“In terms of my role, I’ve helped plan and coordinate the work. I’ve not done anything like this on such a scale. It’s very exciting!”

 **DURHAM CUSTOMER**

“I’m at this pool a lot and all staff have always been friendly and helpful, and they seem happy at work. This makes a big difference to the user experience.”

 **Jump to WHAT HAPPENED** to find out more about happier customers and staff



# ACTIVATORS

A number of Swim Pilots employed **activators** to act as **ambassadors** of the pool out in the community, and as **champions** of the swimming transformation within the leisure centre.

These providers found that activators were **critical** to the success of their pilot – and to providing their customers with great experiences.

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.

## SOUTH SOMERSET

“The social impact of our Swim Gurus was invaluable – handholding new people in to the centre. We’re keeping them on after the pilot for at least another six months.”



**12% increase** Customer satisfaction with friendliness of poolside staff at Swim Local pools (up from 68%)\*

## LUTON

**Your Pool’s** six Swim Champions were effectively **pool concierges**. Front of house they did meet and greets, facility tours and inductions. On the poolside they were a friendly face offering suggestions, tips and motivation. In the community they encouraged new customers and resolved their concerns.

These part-time posts were given to people from a range of socio-demographic backgrounds. Then Your Pool rotated them around their pools – so customers would meet a range of staff representative of their local community.

AQUATIC COACH


# AMBASSADORS & CHAMPIONS

They were given different job titles in different places: **Activators... Swim Champions... Swim Buddies... Swim Advisors... Swim Gurus... Aquavators.**



But they all had a similar range of responsibilities:

- Welcoming people to the pool
- Advising customers on classes and sessions that might suit them.
- Doing pool inductions and walking new customers through changing areas and to the poolside – giving them advice on what to do, where to go, what to wear and pool etiquette.
- Running pool-based classes and sessions.
- Providing individual customers with advice, support and motivation from the poolside.
- Building relationships with regular customers; monitoring their progress and challenging them to reach new goals.
- Building relationships with organisations, groups and influencers in the community.
- Attending events, meetings and clubs to speak one-to-one with people from their target audiences about their barriers to visiting the pool and why they might like to try it.
- Supporting marketing and social media activity.
- Helping to run events, open days and taster sessions.
- Encouraging customers to share their data and feedback.



 **CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

“Our Swim Champions would promote our at-risk classes and suddenly they’d be full!”

 Meet Northumberland’s Swim Advisors on **YouTube**. They are here to help! 

# FRIENDLY FACE

Credit: Active Luton

**85%** Proportion of This Girl Can Swim participants saying a session activator is important\*

Activators provided new customers with a **familiar face**; giving them encouragement and reassurance from the initial point of contact in the community through to the leisure centre reception and on to the poolside.

As such, the Swim Pilots found that it was critical for Activators to have the right personality and attitude for their job.

\*This Girl Can Swim Final Report 2018 Future Thinkin.

**VICTORY LEISURE AND FITNESS CENTRE**

“The This Girl Can Swim activator is loved by the women. She says she almost acts as their instructor and counsellor!”

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

One of Brio’s Swim Champions was so enthusiastic about trying out new ideas to get people involved in their local pool that they wore a waterproof camera to film coming down the slide and doing a fitness class – then posted the videos online to give people a ‘virtual taster’.



# GET STARTED WITH OUR LEARNING LOCKER



Be inspired and learn more about perfecting your end-to-end customer journey with these downloads from our Learning Locker

- Download the Leicester **CASE STUDY** on perfecting the customer journey

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- Download the Northumberland **CASE STUDY** on their Clean Teams

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- Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on perfecting the customer journey

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for improving pool facilities

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for transforming staff culture

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for recruiting & deploying activators

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for appealing to female swimmers

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for making pools more inclusive



# DEEP END

# REACHING OUT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



# REACHING OUT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Swim Pilots knew that they could not transform swimming by just being focused within the leisure centre and simply putting up posters.

They realised they needed to be more outward facing; to break down preconceptions about the activities and facilities on offer at the pool, and to entice people in. So they experimented with new ways to engage people in their local communities who weren't already using the pool regularly.

The more innovative messages and channels they used took them out of their traditional sports development comfort zone; sometimes to the limits of the local authority comfort zone too!

\*Critical Research Swim Local evaluation statistics. Comparing before (2016) and after (2018) the pilot.




**Stable at 79.5%** Swim Local local community relevance KPI compared to a 5% decline nationally (down from 63%)\*

## THEIR AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS AIMED TO:



# INVIGORATED MARKETING

 COVENTRY

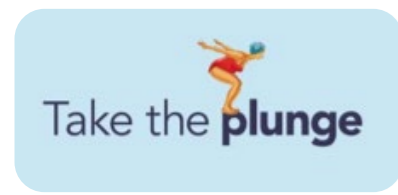
“It simply isn’t enough to just put up a poster and hope people will come.”



Several Swim Local Pilots developed eye-catching swimming brands, to increase the visibility of their pools locally and to unify all their customer communications.

These also created an identity both staff and customers could feel they belonged to.

The brand names chosen tended to include a command to call people to action, or the word ‘your’ to convey individual or community ownership.



**Your pool. Get in!**




**Swim Leicester**  
get active · have fun · learn with us





A number of pilots refreshed their **marketing image libraries** to include images that are **more up-to-date and locally-specific**, which helped to **reinforce local ownership of their brands**.

They took photos in their own pools and used people that were representative of their local community and their target audiences.

 **LEICESTER**

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**Active Leicester** took photos and filmed videos that customers would feel featured ‘people like me’. Their models weren’t super fit and attractive, nor did they have an amazing swim technique. They were ‘real people’ who wore a range of swimwear; from burkinis and shorts and t-shirts to bikinis and speedos.



The Swim Pilots refreshed and expanded their range of **marketing materials**, for use both in-house and around the community.

These included: leaflets, brochures, vouchers, posters, banners, Swim Fit cards, timetables and staff uniforms.



**NORTHUMBERLAND**  
 Rather than use photos of real people **Northumberland** opted to use quirky illustrations for their Take the Plunge campaign.

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**  
**Brio** designed a 3D floor vinyl of a pool that they installed at Baron's Quay Shopping Centre. It raised awareness of swimming with shoppers while they had a virtual splash around, and also reached 17,000 people through Facebook posts about it.

**The pilots ran multi-platform marketing campaigns which:**

- Helped build their local swimming brand
- Promoted the benefits of getting active in the pool
- Highlighted the local swimming offer
- Drew attention to their new and improved facilities
- Advertised specific events or promotions

Sometimes the tone of these campaigns was quite different from their usual corporate or local authority approach.



**SEFTON**

Active Sefton used their customer insight as part of their marketing campaign – highlighting what they'd been told by the community and the action they'd subsequently taken. For example, they used a comment about communal showers to promote new individual shower cubicles in a set of eye catching ads that made it appear as if people were showering in bus stops.

**SEFTON**

“These ads were so far outside the Council’s comfort zone they went all the way up to the Chief Exec for sign off!”

As part of these campaigns the Swim Pilots experimented with paid-for advertising over a range of local media outlets.

Some were felt to have been more successful, such as newspapers and magazines, TV, digital banners, and outdoors on buses, bin lorries, billboards and bus stops. Local radio and petrol pump advertising were not felt to have been as worthwhile.

The pilots also issued press releases and held photo opportunities in order to generate news and editorial coverage across local media.



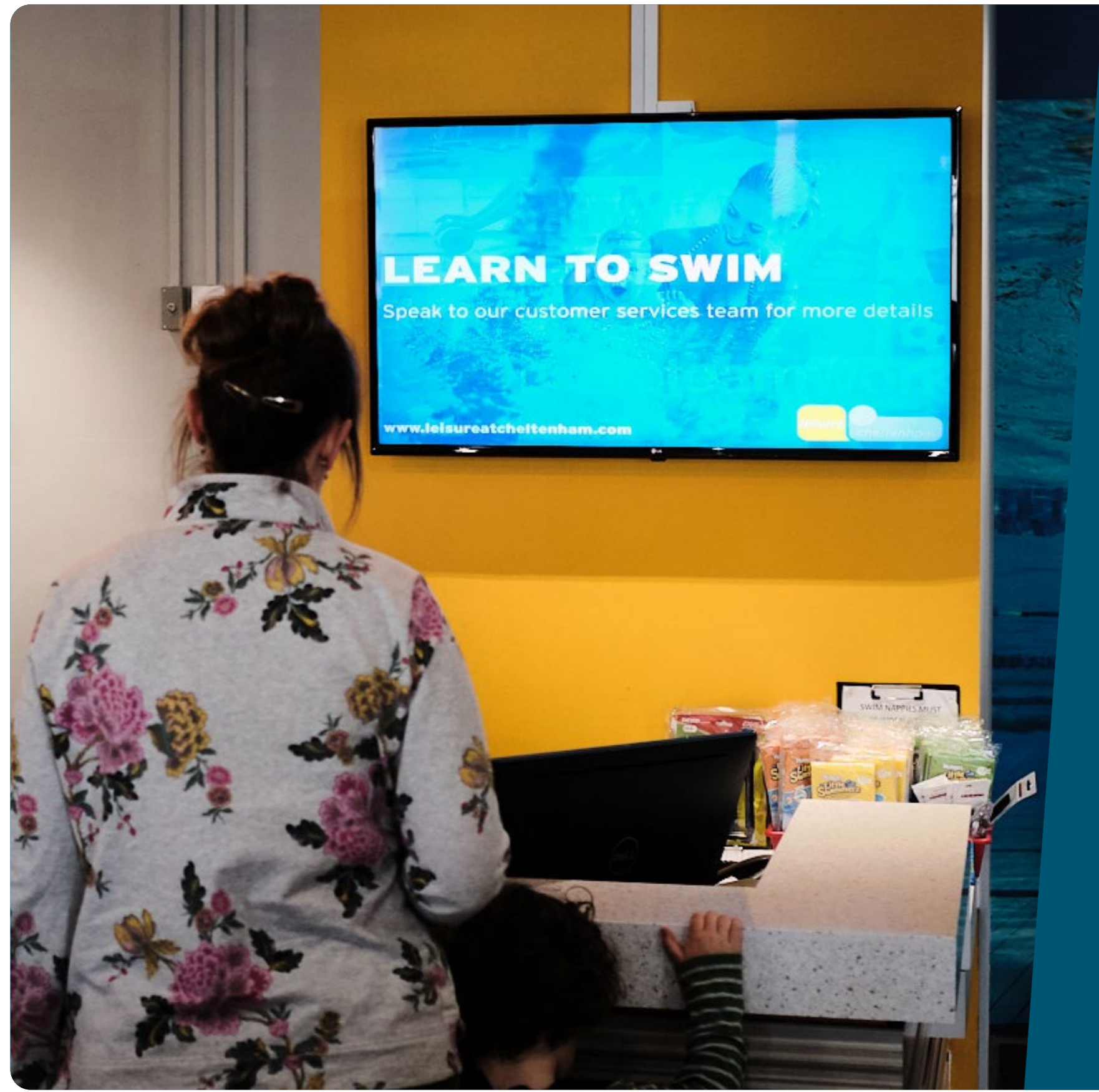
SEFTON

Your Pool. Get In! got 60,000 impressions using location-based advertising – which targets in-app adverts at smartphone users located in specific postcodes.

DURHAM

An animated TV advert about Durham's £10 family summer swim offer was watched over 100,000 times when broadcast to 23,000 local households that matched their target Mosaic profile.





To make the most of their building as a marketing asset several pilots put up eye-catching **external signs**. Others installed **digital screens** in their reception areas, so they could promote the pool to leisure centre customers who up until that point had only contemplated using the gym and courts.

**SALFORD**

When **Swim Your Way** took their Float Fit equipment down to Salford Quays to run outdoor classes in the summer their customers loved it, but it was also a great PR stunt to raise awareness of their new classes.



**SOUTH SOMERSET**

By putting up new signs outside **Goldenstones Leisure Centre** LED hoped to catch the eye of local people walking and cycling in the surrounding Nine Springs Country Park, who may not have realised they could also get active in the pool there.

# SOCIAL MEDIA & VIDEOS

The Swim Pilots used social media to raise people’s awareness of what was on offer at the local pool - using both organic content and paid-for advertising.

Some Swim Pilots also used social media to connect their customers into an online community. This reinforced their efforts to make the pool a more sociable place, and also provided providers with a channel through which they could get messages to customers.

Sharing videos was found to be key to engaging people on social media. These might be videos of sessions or facilities, to whet people’s appetites or help demystify the pool; or more light-hearted videos featuring leisure centre staff or customers. The pilots found videos were particularly good value for money, as they could also be used on in-house digital screens, their website and during outreach visits.

A positive by-product of the pilots’ development of digital communications is that in the long run they think these will be cheaper to maintain than traditional print channels.



Watch Northumberland’s Float Fit video (53k views) on YouTube





**ADULT LEARN TO SWIM EVALUATION**

“Using social media to share success stories and pictures of what sessions were like worked best for drawing adults in.”

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

After 4,000+ people viewed **Brio’s** post about Swim-a-Song kids’ sessions the class went from 7 people to being fully booked.

**NORTH TYNESIDE**

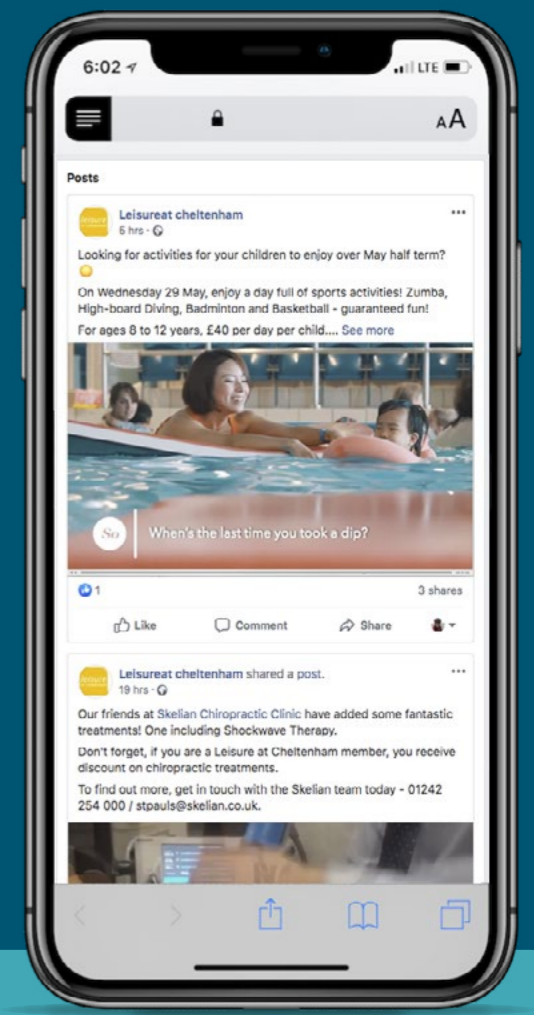
**North Tyneside** designate an assistant manager in each leisure centre as its social media rep. They are expected to allocate two days worth of time each month to social media and meet with their counterparts every three months to share best practice. A new Business & Marketing Advisor post has also been created – to ensure social media platforms are managed continuously.

**COVENTRY**

The Swim & Tonic Whatsapp group that connects customers of **Xcel Leisure Centre** has over 350 members.

**CHELTENHAM**

An eight-second teaser clip of **Leisure at Cheltenham’s** new toddler splash pool got 38,000 views and generated 850 comments on Facebook. This helped to ensure the Splash Pad was operating at full capacity for the first three weeks after it opened.



# OUT AND ABOUT IN THE COMMUNITY

The Swim Pilots found that it was absolutely critical for their team to leave the leisure centre and go out in to the local community to talk face-to-face with local residents; talking to them about the activities on offer at the pool, why they might find them beneficial, and discussing any issues preventing them from coming along to try them out.

Some pilots took a **field marketing** approach to their outreach – visiting local events, supermarkets and DIY stores with stands and mascots to hand out leaflets and vouchers to a cross-section of people in the local community.

Other pilots targeted key **community hubs** where they could reach concentrations of people from their target audiences. The types of places they targeted included: nurseries, schools, children’s centres, groups and clubs (e.g. parent & toddler and slimming clubs) and support groups for specific health conditions.

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER:**  
Brio visited parent and toddler groups to talk to parents about sessions like **Swim-a-Song** that they might find fun. They gave out passes to encourage people to come and have a go for free.



 NORTH TYNESIDE

“Don’t underestimate the power of a mascot! At local events people will flock to you, then you can start up a conversation with them and give them information about what’s on at your pool.”



The Swim Local Pilots in particular spent time building relationships with organisations, groups and influencers that represent specific sections of their target audiences.

Through these they began to better understand the needs of these audiences and the barriers that may prevent them from coming to the pool. They spent time with their target audiences in places they were already comfortable visiting, building one-to-one relationships and building a foundation of trust so they could then start to encourage them along to the pool.

**CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER**

Brio targeted councillors, community centres, schools and groups (e.g. women’s, young carers) in eight deprived wards in Cheshire West & Chester. The free swims, Level 1 & 2 intensive courses and group sessions they offered over the summer generated an additional 1,640 visits to local pools.

**NORTH TYNESIDE**

North Tyneside built relationships with Age UK and Learning Disability Northeast, and then began visiting the events they put on, such as Age UK’s tea dances.

**COVENTRY**

Go Swim ran a Fish and Chip Bingo Night with local figurehead Anne-Marie (coordinator of the community centre in Canley). Swimming wasn’t the focus of the night; the food and fun was, although the prizes were mainly related to Xcel (the local leisure centre). Go Swim talked to the 15 families that attended to understand why being active wasn’t a priority for them and how the pool could be made more accessible for them. 13 of the families are now active users of the pool and one of the daughters is a volunteer, who has gone on to complete Coventry’s Young Ambassador programme.

**HAMBLETON**

To reach older and mobility impaired people Zest engaged with local charities and support groups for people with specific health conditions (e.g. cancer, Parkinson’s, multiple sclerosis, dementia). To reach their female target audience they used a network of local hairdressers and beauticians.



As a shortcut to relationship building, some pilots linked to their organisation’s existing community outreach team, and piggybacked on the relationships they had already built within the local community.

A few pilots worked with key organisations and influencers, or directly with community members themselves, to co-design and deliver initiatives based around the pool that would appeal to specific parts of the community and meet their specific needs.



**SALFORD**

Swim Your Way pursued leads from their local authority’s Community Development Team. They started to attend the regular meetings that bring community outreach organisations and initiatives together, which gave them access to young carers and carers groups, GP surgeries’ Community Connectors, the local Health improvement Team, and a loneliness initiative.

**CHELTENHAM**

Leisure at Cheltenham worked with local charity to get families from Hesters Way (an area with a high proportion of less affluent households) down to the pool. They ran two pool taster sessions over the summer holidays – mini-bussing people down to the leisure centre for a walk through of the facilities and a free swim. Interested families were then given a free two-month membership. About 40 families took part (c. 80 people); particularly engaging parents who were isolated or lacking in confidence.

A number of pilots cultivated **champions**, who already had the ear of local communities and would spread the word about their swimming transformation.

Others realised that customers themselves were the best champions and encouraged **word of mouth** advertising.



**DISABILITY SWIMMING**

Stratford Leisure Centre encouraged several existing members with a disability to act as ambassadors and share their own experiences of how swimming had benefited them with other disabled people in the community.

**THIS GIRL CAN SWIM**

Despite local marketing under the umbrella of the national **This Girl Can** campaign, nearly a third of **This Girl Can Swim** participants found out about their local session via word of mouth. So leisure centres asked the women to amplify this effect, by taking pictures and sharing posts on social media (where about 10% of women heard about sessions).

**HAMBLETON**

“We befriended a local radio presenter, getting them to try out different sessions and facilities at different local pools – which they then talked about on-air.”



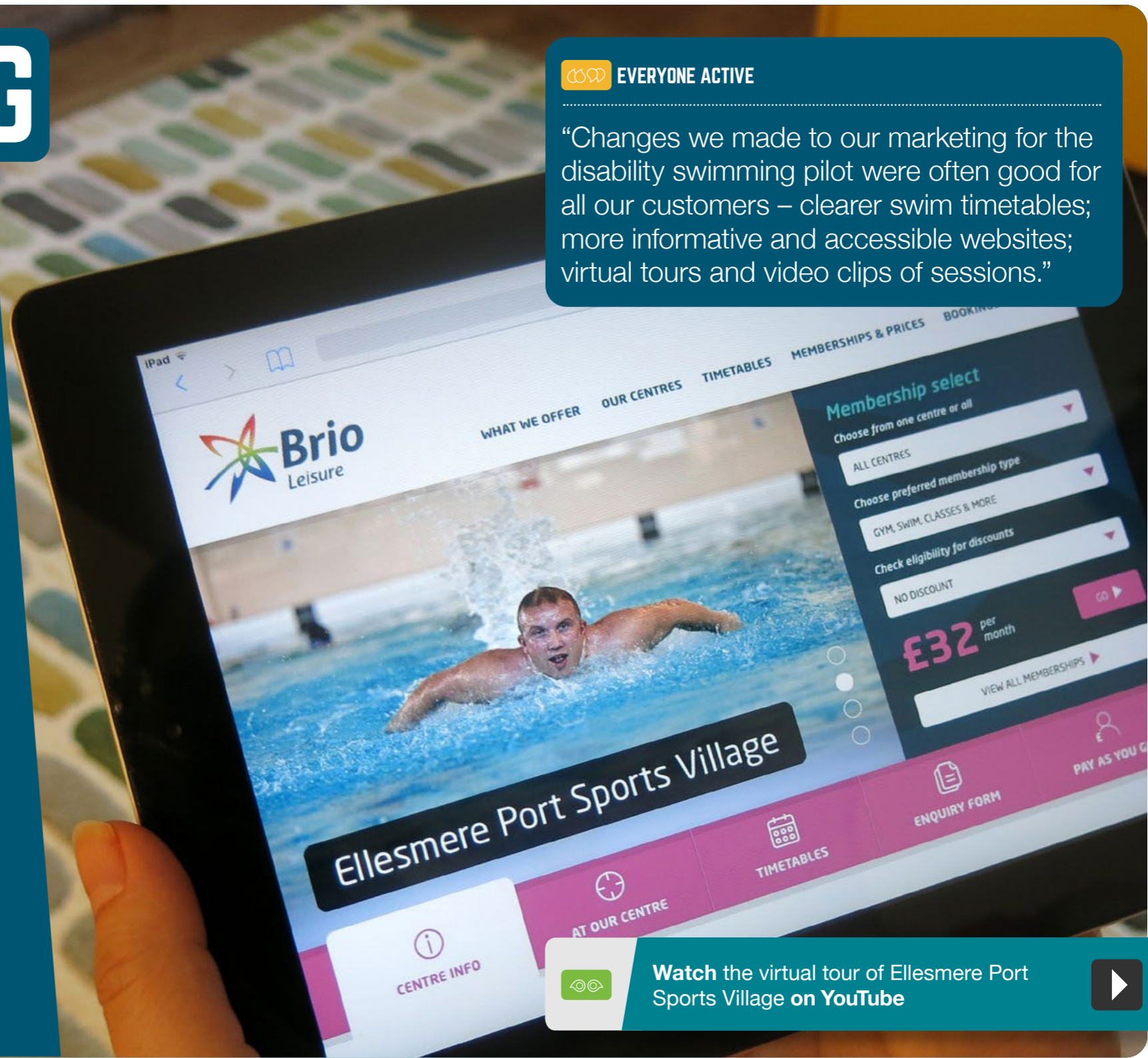
# DEMYSTIFYING THE POOL

The Swim Pilots used a range of approaches to provide information about their pools; to update people’s perceptions, provide them with answers to questions and reassure them about any concerns stopping them from coming along.

They circulated **leaflets** about specific sessions and **brochures** that explained all the different activities on offer. Some made their **websites** more informative and user-friendly, giving clearer information about the facilities available at each pool.

**Virtual tour** videos put on websites or social media were especially popular – walking people through the leisure centre and swimming experience so they’d know what to expect and bring along when they came for real. Parents, carers and people with specific disabilities or health concerns found these particularly useful.

New customers were offered **pool inductions**, which also gave staff a chance to suggest sessions that might suit them, and to educate them on changing room and pool etiquette.



## EVERYONE ACTIVE

“Changes we made to our marketing for the disability swimming pilot were often good for all our customers – clearer swim timetables; more informative and accessible websites; virtual tours and video clips of sessions.”

Watch the virtual tour of Ellesmere Port Sports Village on YouTube





Credit: Active Luton

**A couple of pilots created apps to make it simpler for customers to access timetables and book classes.**

Some pilots held **open days** so potential customers could try out activities for free and see the facilities on offer firsthand.

**KEN MARTIN LEISURE CENTRE, NOTTINGHAM**

“We put on a ladies’ night with lots of activities for women to try out, including Zumba, swimming and yoga. We even had mocktails. It was really successful!”

**DURHAM**

Durham see their app as a key legacy of their pilot; one which could help save them £6,000 in printing costs. The app has searchable timetables and allows people to book sessions or monitor waiting lists for swim lessons.

600 people downloaded it in the first two weeks it was live and new members are now being encouraged to download it as part of the sign-up process.

**CHELTENHAM**

600 people came along to the free **Swim Showcase** at Leisure at Cheltenham. People could try out diving, Float Fit and the new pool pod. They could also have a swimming assessment and get advice on the pool activities best suited to them. A party atmosphere was created with family fun activities and kids entertainment.



# INCENTIVES

Open days weren't the only **loss leaders** the Swim Pilots tried to give people a taste of the pool and whet their appetite before they committed to paying for sessions.

When launching new activities and classes they often offered free **taster sessions**. Some providers offered one-off **free swims** to new customers. A couple offered free swimming to a key target audience on a regular basis.

Several pilots offered short-term **price deals** and **discounts**. A number of pilots gave away vouchers offering **5 swims for £5** and found these were particularly popular.

## 🏊 NORTH TYNESIDE

On Friday's over 60's can swim for free in **North Tyneside's** pools. More than 1,100 seniors have taken up the offer – 450 of who were new customers. Overall senior swimming is up 12%, as two-thirds are attending paid-for sessions too. There has also been an 8% increase in seniors taking up swim & gym memberships.

## 🏊 DURHAM

**Durham** offered a summer holiday £10 swim deal for families of four.

## 🏊 CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

**Brio** has made their Pool & Fuel deal for parents and children permanent. Pay to swim and for £1.50 extra get sandwich, salad or hot meal and a drink afterwards.



# Over 60s Free Swim Fridays

From September 2017 swimming is **FREE** at all our pools for all over-60s on Fridays. No need to book – just come along with proof of age.

## The Swim Pilots tried different ways of distributing discount vouchers.

### HAMBLETON

**Just Add Water** decided the **Summer Swim Blitz** voucher booklet they distributed via schools and community groups was just too complex, as despite giving out thousands of booklets only 100 vouchers were redeemed. In future they'll keep their discounts simple and limited to just a handful of offers.

### CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

**Brio** got council outreach officers working with local businesses to distribute **Bring a Friend 2-for-1** discount vouchers to workers who might want a lunchtime swim. Unfortunately very few were redeemed.

### SALFORD

**Swim Your Way** gave **free swim** and **5 for £5** vouchers in bulk to social housing groups and new developments. These were put in welcome packs for new residents – who might then be tempted to familiarise themselves with the pool just when they are in a period of transition when new habits are more likely to be formed.

### LUTON

**Your Pool** door-dropped 85,000 free swim vouchers. About 6,000 were cashed in – an 7% take-up. They also gave away 3,400 **5 for £5** vouchers. These were all cashed in, with 80% of people using all five swims on their card. Many then become regular visitors or members.



The Swim Pilots generally asked casual customers to sign up for free reward cards or to redeem vouchers, so they could capture their contact details and other information that would help with their monitoring and marketing.



**HAMBLETON**

Just Add Water offered annual discount cards to casual users, which entitled them to their first swim for free. These cards usually cost £5 but Hambleton calculated that the value of the customer data they captured was worth giving them away for free.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

1,650 people signed up for a free Take the Plunge card. This entitled them to their first and tenth pool visits for free, as well as a free month's membership once they logged 50 swims. Each month active users are also entered in to a prize draw.


The **Activators** employed by Swim Local projects were absolutely critical to their marketing and outreach. They built relationships with organisations, groups and influencers; creating **new partnerships**.

They provided new customers with a **familiar face**; giving them encouragement and reassurance from the initial point of contact in their own community hub through to the leisure centre's reception and on to the poolside.

Activators were also active on social media; ran open days and taster sessions; walked people through their pool inductions; got people to sign up for reward cards; recorded videos and organised photo opportunities.

They acted as **ambassadors** of the pool when out in the community and as champions of the swimming transformation within the leisure centre.



 [Jump to CUSTOMER JOURNEY](#) to find out more about activators 

# GET STARTED WITH OUR LEARNING LOCKER



Be inspired and learn more about effectively reaching out to your local community with these downloads from our Learning Locker

- Download the Coventry **CASE STUDY** on connecting with the community

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- Download the Durham **CASE STUDY** on marketing

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- Download the South Somerset **CASE STUDY** on their interactive timetable

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- Download our **DESIGN CHECKLIST** on reaching out to the community

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for branding, marketing and social media

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- Download our **TOP TIPS** for effective community outreach



## DEEP END

# MAXIMISING SOCIAL VALUE



# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**CHELTENHAM**

“You need to become a community centre - not just a leisure centre.”

Many of the providers running Swim Pilot pools are local authorities, or are trusts or operators running pools on their behalf. Their bottom line is not just financial. They want their leisure centres to be beneficial community assets; helping to create **healthy communities in the broadest sense**.

The Swim Pilots’ efforts to make themselves relevant and accountable, modernise their offer, perfect customer journeys and to reach out more effectively to their local community made their pools places where local residents would be more likely to get active, have fun and improve their **physical health**.

This in itself has a valuable social impact, but there are also five other ways in which Swim Pilot pools boosted their community value...





# HEALTH, WELLBEING, EDUCATION & CRIME

**£341** Annual social value of a swimmer\*

For every new customer regularly active in their pools the Swim Pilots created **£341** per year in **social value** from the associated positive impacts on improved health, improved life satisfaction, increased educational attainment and crime reduction.\*

Leisure centres generate the highest social values from group workouts and classes – £431 per person – in part due to the significant impact these have on improved life satisfaction.\*

So by running **more aquatic classes** like AquaFit and Float Fit the Swim Pilots will have generated higher than average social values for their swimmers – as they are essentially doing group exercise classes...just in water.

\* Physical Activity – A Social Solution (2018) UK Active & DataHub

**SEFTON**

“We used the pool as part of the school holiday Park Nights initiative – a Police & Crime Commissioner funded programme to reduce antisocial behaviour. So on a Friday night teenagers were having an Ibiza Pool Party – rather than out on the streets terrorising people!”



# WELLBEING

In particular, the Swim Pilots will have improved the life satisfaction of local residents at higher risk of mental health issues or social isolation - who they enticed into the pool with specific facilities, activities and offers.

This includes some people who may be:

- Low income
- Older
- BAME (especially women)
- Disabled
- Living with neurological conditions
- Living with long-term health conditions
- Rehabilitating after surgery or injury



Credit: Active Luton

## ♿ NORTH TYNESIDE

Over 60s get free entry to **North Tyneside's** pools on Free Swim Fridays. After their dip they're encouraged to meet for a chat in the leisure centre's cafe. More than 1,100 seniors have taken up the offer – 450 of which were new customers.

Overall senior swimming is up 12%, as two thirds are attending paid-for sessions too. There has also been an 8% increase in seniors taking up swim & gym memberships. Local politicians are keenly aware of the wider benefits of keeping older residents active – both physically and socially – so Swim Free Fridays have been made a permanent fixture.

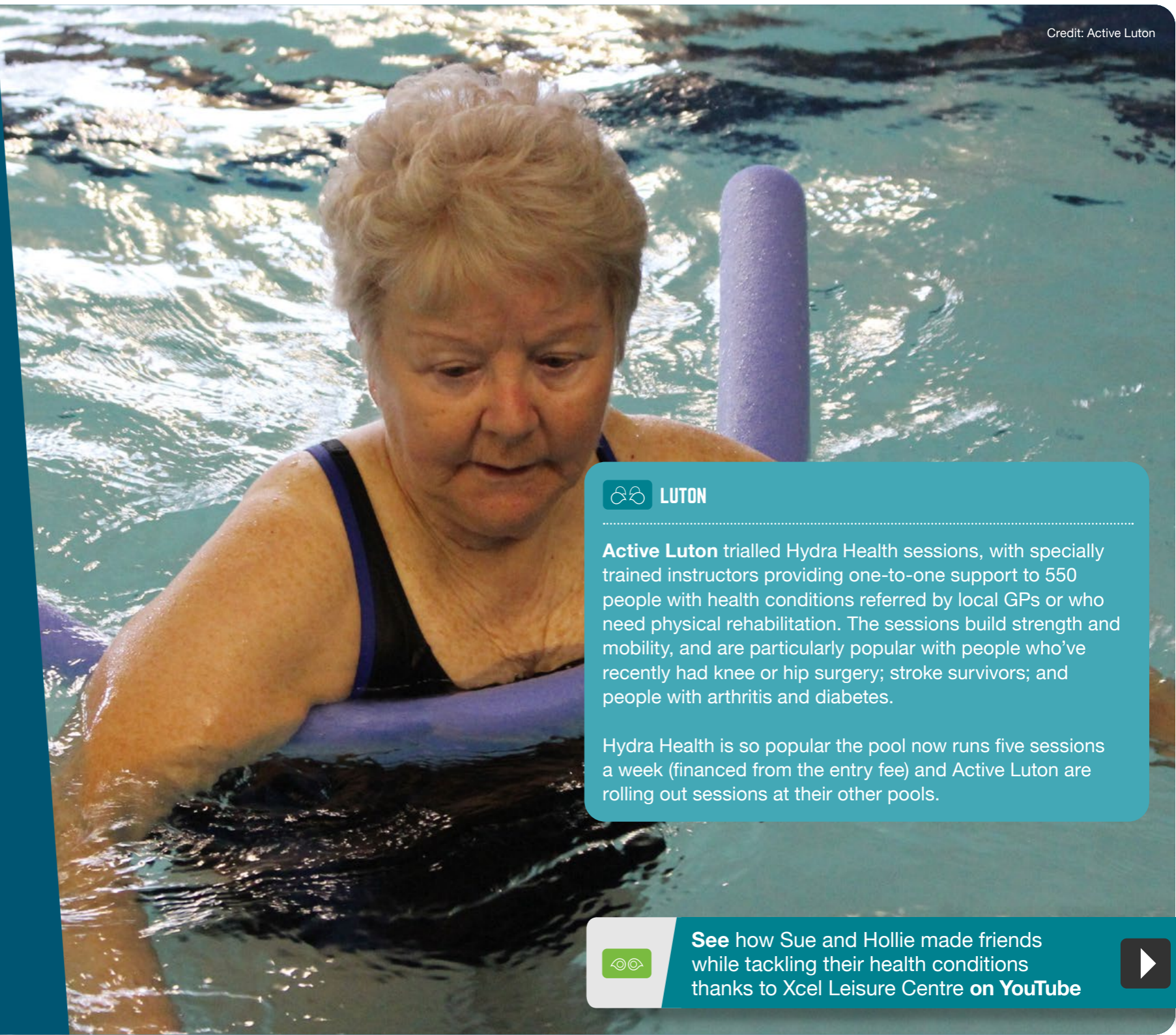


**28% BAME + 20% disabled** Women attending single-sex This Girl Can Swim sessions – compared to the national profile of female swimmers of 8% and 12% respectively\*

\* This Girl Can Swim Final Report (2018) Future thinking.

**For example the Swim Pilots:**

- Provided leaflets, online information about accessible facilities, videos and virtual tours – to answer people’s questions about activities and facilities before they left home.
- Made sure their marketing materials included images of more types of people from their local communities – so people knew ‘people like me’ were welcome.
- Did pool inductions and installed better signage – to help people find their way around easier.
- Put pegs, storage cubbies and seating on the poolside, and installed pool hoists and accessible steps – so people could get in to the pool with confidence and dignity.
- Made changing cubicles bigger, with more benches and hooks – so that getting changed became less hassle.
- Installed privacy blinds by the pool and individual showers – for those who are self-conscious or adhering to religious or cultural beliefs.
- Employed activators who built one-to-one customer relationships – to encourage and support people in to the leisure centre and in to the pool.
- Ran special sessions such as with privacy blinds, calmer ambiance, specific activities or social time afterwards – to appeal to their physical, social and cultural needs.
- Created offers and incentives – to make the pool more affordable to people on benefits and low income.
- Worked with GP surgeries – to offer pool-based activities on referral to people needing to get active.
- Improved seating and viewing areas, and provided better cafe facilities – to encourage customers and carers to socialise longer after being in the pool.



Credit: Active Luton

**LUTON**

**Active Luton** trialled Hydra Health sessions, with specially trained instructors providing one-to-one support to 550 people with health conditions referred by local GPs or who need physical rehabilitation. The sessions build strength and mobility, and are particularly popular with people who’ve recently had knee or hip surgery; stroke survivors; and people with arthritis and diabetes.

Hydra Health is so popular the pool now runs five sessions a week (financed from the entry fee) and Active Luton are rolling out sessions at their other pools.

**See how Sue and Hollie made friends while tackling their health conditions thanks to Xcel Leisure Centre on YouTube**

# SOCIAL SPACE

The wellbeing benefits of pool-based activities were amplified by Swim Pilots providing more space and time for people to socialise during their visit to the pool.

These benefits would have been even more significant for customers from the high risk groups previously mentioned, and their carers.

Building in social time after swimming activities not only gave people time to build friendships – which can inspire repeat visits – but gave staff time to encourage customers to try other activities and services.

New cafe areas and improved seating not only encouraged more socialising, they also encouraged more secondary spending on food and drink.

## SALFORD

Having a local Tesco donate fresh fruit for their pool parties means **Swim Your Way** feeds the kids attending, who are often from low income families.

## THIS GIRL CAN SWIM

The most successful **This Girl Can Swim** initiatives included a visit to a local pub after each evening female-only swim session.



## CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER

By having playpens and high chairs in their seating area **Brio** encourages parents to stay for refreshments and socialising after toddler-friendly swim sessions. A soft play area and tablets with games means kids are kept occupied while parents chat.

## HAMBLETON

The viewing area at **Stokesley Leisure Centre** is now a more relaxing space for parents and carers to socialise in while they wait. New benches, armchairs and tables have made it more comfortable; while new flooring, brighter lighting and air conditioning have created a more pleasant atmosphere.



**Jump to SWIMMING OFFER** for other examples of how Swim Pilots made their pools more social



# VOLUNTEERS



A few leisure centres took on volunteers to help deliver their Swim Local initiatives. In some cases this gave older people or people with learning impairments the chance to get more social interaction, or for young people to get work experience.

## COVENTRY

Coventry's volunteers range in age from 13 to 70 and they all bring something different to the workplace mix. As they provide valuable additional staff capacity Go Swim think their volunteers are worth investing in. They are given branded uniforms and are always invited to staff social events.

Tex is one such volunteer. His life was turned upside down 18 months ago when he had a stroke. Although in his seventies Tex had been very busy as a gymnastics coach; as a former personal trainer he knows the importance of keeping active. The stroke devastated Tex. He lost his speech, use of his arm and, most importantly, it left him unable to drive and cut off from all his usual activities.

Swim Activator Wendy bumped into Tex at the Xcel Leisure Centre cafe. She noticed he was very down, so offered to get in the pool to help him... and began to think about how else she could help.

Now, in return for volunteering at a local gymnastics club based at Xcel, Tex swims for free at their early bird Cereal Swimmers session. He loves it so much he does the 10-minute walk to Xcel every day from his home in Canley.

As he says: "To be able to get out everyday, walk slowly, swim and have breakfast with people has given me my life back."

Gymnastics might be Tex's passion, but it's swimming that's given him a new lease of life.

# SUPPORTING OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES

**Some Swim Local pilots made their leisure centre or pool activities available for the benefit of public services unrelated to the sport and activity sector.**

This made the leisure centre a more **cost-effective local authority asset** – as it was providing more than just a sport and leisure function. It also provided opportunities for pool staff to try and engage new audiences in getting active in the pool.

## NORTH TYNESIDE

**North Tyneside's** leisure centres loan space for free for public health and baby clinics, while Age UK rent their sports hall for events with older people. So pool staff go along to these events to talk to families, inactive and older people about activities in the pool that might appeal to them.

The Council's Children's Services team find that offering free swimming to looked-after children helps them to build positive relations with foster families, and to start a conversation about the other ways in which the council can support them.



## NORTHUMBERLAND

“We’re moving towards being a community health and wellness hub. We have a lit and heated building open seven days a week, so we’re asking ourselves how can it be used to help other services, such as adult social care? We want to be a cost-effective front-line hub for multiple council services.”

 **Jump to WHAT HAPPENED** to read more about how the pools became community centres



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- Download the **DEEP DIVE** on swim sessions and classes

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- Download the **DEEP DIVE** on how transforming swimming supports local strategic goals



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & PICTURE CREDITS

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- Cheltenham Borough Council & The Cheltenham Trust
- Cheshire West & Chester Council & Brio Leisure
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- Durham County Council
- Everyone Active
- GLL
- Hambleton District Council
- Leicester City Council
- Luton Borough Council & Active Luton
- North Tyneside Council
- Northumberland County Council & Active Northumberland
- Nottingham City Council
- Places for People
- Salford City Council & Salford Community Leisure Trust
- Sefton Council
- Serco
- South Somerset District Council & LED Community Leisure
- SwimTag

Special thanks to the authors of evaluation reports for This Girl Can Swim, Adult Learn to Swim, Disability Swim and Rule the Pool – for allowing the results, learning, pictures and examples from these Swim Pilots to be used in this toolkit.

- Activity Alliance (formerly English Federation of Disability Sport)
- Everyone Active
- Future Thinking
- Places for People
- SwimTag