

Agenda Item 6

Proposal to Close School Swimming Pools

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Falkirk Council

Title: Proposal to Close School Swimming Pools
Meeting: Falkirk Council
Date: 29 March 2023
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the proposal to close four school swimming pools.
- 1.2 This report aligns with the 2022/27 Council Plan by supporting the strategic enabler of financial sustainability and the strategic priority of a green transition.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that Council:

- (i) note the detail and context of the proposed closures and feedback from the public consultation;**
- (ii) agree that the closure of all 4 pools is progressed in a phased annual basis from August 2023 onwards, with Grangemouth High School pool the first to close from August 2023; and**
- (iii) agree that the Director of Children's Services undertakes further assessment of the other 3 swimming pools and reports back to Council later this year with a plan for a phased closure programme from August 2024.**

3. Climate Change Implications

- 3.1 The recommendations of this report will directly contribute to reduced carbon emissions as part of the planned review of school pool efficiencies and practices. This will contribute to the key outcome of the property strategy in assisting the council to meet its climate change objectives by 2030.
- 3.2 The Council's electricity and gas emissions for 2021/22 amounted to 16,212 tonnes of CO₂e. Falkirk's current 9 school swimming pools generate around 1,722 tonnes of CO₂e per annum. This represents c11% of the Council's total. The 4 school swimming pools proposed for closure account for 766 tonnes of CO₂e. Closure of these 4 pools would represent an overall energy savings for the Council of c5%. Failure to rationalise Falkirk Council's large swimming pool estate will make it more difficult for the organisation to achieve its Net Zero targets by 2030.

4. Background

4.1 Falkirk Council on 18 May 2021 agreed as part of the Strategic Property Review to consider a rationalisation of the swimming pool portfolio across the Falkirk area. At the Executive Meeting on 6 December 2022, it was agreed that a separate report, out-with the Strategic Property Review, considering the potential closure of 4 school swimming pools should be brought forward to a future meeting for a decision.

4.2 The Council's Budget report (1 March 2023) highlighted that the Council has a projected funding gap to 2026/27 of **£63.7m** and provided a range of budget savings proposals that identified actions that if approved would help reduce this funding deficit. These activities include transformation, improvement, service operational reductions, Council tax strategies, service concessions and borrowing requirements. Whilst the Council agreed its 2023-24 budget on 1 March 2023, a significant budget gap still remains to be addressed over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

4.3 The option to close **4** of Falkirk's secondary school swimming pools was included as part of Children's Services overall budget savings proposals. The selection of the 4 swimming pools (Falkirk HS, Graeme HS, Grangemouth HS and Larbert HS) was made based on the following strategic assessments:

- Location based on accessibility to other swimming pools in the local area.
- Distribution of swimming pools across the 3 locality areas; East, West and Central.
- Income generation for Falkirk Council across all school pools in the current financial year.
- Pool usage based on the available number of slots during and beyond the school day for curriculum delivery, learn to swim delivery, club access and community access.

4.4 Curriculum for Excellence and SQA sets out the guidance for schools across Scotland to follow. There is no statutory obligation for schools to have a swimming pool, provide swimming lessons or offer swimming as part the PE curriculum. Many secondary schools in Scotland do not have a swimming pool, and parents will often enrol their children in Learn to Swim programmes rather than rely upon provision as part of the curriculum.

5. Current Context – Engagement and Consultation Feedback

5.1 To assist in the preparation of this report the undernoted engagements and consultations have taken place:

- 11 Strategic Property Review (SPR) Engagement sessions undertaken from 10 January 2023 to 25 January 2023 discussing all assets noted in the SPR report. Whilst the school swimming pools were not part of the SPR review, they featured in every engagement.
- Parent Council Forums during January and February 2023.
- Individual School briefings – January 2023.
- National Swimming Organisations – during January and February 2023.

- Local Swimming Organisations – 31 January 2023.

5.2 The consultation and engagement sessions highlighted the following concerns:

Key Themes
Swimming is a life skill: all pupils should have equal access to swimming lessons
Impact to physical and mental health & wellbeing
Impact on curriculum delivery: the additional time required to walk or transport pupils to another pool and the impact on timetabling

5.3 A summary and analysis of the feedback received via the SPR meetings, or the engagement sessions stated above is attached as Appendix 1.

Summary of Current Swimming Pool Provision in Falkirk

5.4 Currently Falkirk Council has 12 locations with swimming pools:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| • Secondary Schools | 8 |
| • Carrongrange High School | 1 |
| • Sports Centres | 3 |
| • Total | 12 |

As part of the current exercise a summary of the pool type, management arrangements and weekly availability is summarised in Appendix 3.

It should be noted that this is a high level of provision compared to other Councils as set out in paragraphs 5.8-5.10.

5.5 The 8 mainstream secondary schools are run and operated by management companies on behalf of the Council through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreements.

5.6 Each school timetables their pool to deliver a range of programmes and courses from Broad General Education (BGE), National qualifications, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, as well several bespoke targeted programmes such as girls only swim sessions.

Out-with the school day pool use is managed by:

- Falkirk HS & Grangemouth HS - Sport & Leisure Team
- Larbert HS – Tryst Community Sports Club
- Graeme HS - Children’s Services (via lets)

If a school pool is closed, then the school would undertake a review into the delivery of an updated PE curriculum and course choice options going forward, using the range of other sports and activities that are available. This would mirror the approach taken by hundreds of schools across Scotland which don't have swimming pools on site.

- 5.7 A summary of the current usage of school swimming pools is attached at Appendix 2. These figures do not show any group or club use where they have a commercial arrangement with Class98 for access to pools out-with the Falkirk Council contracted access times, i.e Saturday pm and Sundays.

Costs for Out-with School Community Access

- 5.8 The former Falkirk Community Trust (FCT) had an agreement with Class98 to extend the contracted opening times at Braes HS and Larbert HS to provide increased and wider community access to the sport and leisure facilities. This also helped support the then Trusts target to generate additional income. The costs of this are directly charged to Children's Services through the PPP contract and are currently c.£380k per annum. The FCT subsequently transferred the management of Larbert HS to the Tryst Community Sports Club.
- 5.9 In addition, Children's Services pay Class98 for any community lets that extend beyond the current contract times for both Bo'ness Academy and Graeme HS. The current lets costs for this are c.£100k per annum.
- 5.10 All income from community lets (2 secondary schools) is handled by the Education Division and income generated from the wider community use of the remaining 6 secondary schools is managed by the Sport and Leisure Division (5 secondary schools) and the Tryst Community Sports Club (for Larbert HS).

Benchmarking with other Scottish Local Authorities.

- 5.11 The table below provides information gathered so far from our comparison of the pools per head of population in Falkirk compared to other local authorities.

Local Authority	Total number of pools	School and community pool split		Population	Population Per Pool
		S	C		
West Lothian	18	10	8	183,820	10,212
Stirling	7	4	3	93,470	13,353
Falkirk	12	9	3	160,700	14,609
Fife	14	5	9	374,730	26,766
Glasgow	20	8	12	635,130	31,757
North Ayrshire	4	0	4	134,220	33,555
Renfrewshire	5	0	5	179,940	35,988
Perth	4	1	3	153,810	38,453
East Ayrshire	3	2	1	122,020	40,673
North Lanarkshire	7	0	7	341,400	48,771
Clackmannanshire	0	0	0	51,540	n/a

- 5.12 From the data gathered from 11 local authorities, it shows that Falkirk has the 3rd most generous provision of swimming pools per head of population, with a significant gap back to 4th place.

Note: If the proposal to close 4 pools is agreed, Falkirk would still remain in 3rd place, with 1 pool for each 20,088 of population.

Benchmarking With Local Authorities Mainstream Secondary Schools

- 5.13 The undernoted data was also gathered which considered the number of mainstream secondary schools which had a swimming pool.

Local Authority	No of mainstream secondary schools	No of schools with swimming pools	% of Schools with Pools	Rank
Falkirk	8	8	100	1
West Lothian	11	10	91	2
Stirling	7	4	57	3
East Ayrshire	7	2	29	4
Fife	18	5	28	5
Glasgow	30	8	27	6
Perth & Kinross	10	1	10	7
Clackmannanshire	3	0	0	8=
North Ayrshire	10	0	0	8=
North Lanarkshire	23	0	0	8=
Renfrewshire	11	0	0	8=

Proximity to Nearest Alternative Swimming Pool

- 5.14 The table below shows the distances from all of the pools proposed for closure to other pools:

Using Google Maps		Alternative Swimming Venue				
School	Grangemouth Sports Complex	Mariner Sport Centre	Bo'ness Academy	Braes High School	Denny High School	St Mungo's High School
Mileage (Shortest distance via Main Roads)						
Falkirk High School	4.4	0.9	9.2	4.2	4.4	1.3
Graeme High School	3.6	2.5	7.4	2.4	6.1	2.8
Grangemouth High School	0.9	5.7	5.3	3.1	11.3	5.4
Larbert High School	5.7	3.2	10.9	6.5	4.3	2.2
Using Google Maps		Alternative Swimming Venue				
School	Grangemouth Sports Complex	Mariner Sport Centre	Bo'ness Academy	Braes High School	Denny High School	St Mungo's High School
Walking (Minutes using shortest distance)						
Falkirk High School		15				21
Graeme High School		46		43		42
Grangemouth High School	18			53		
Larbert High School		43				44

6. Proposals on the way forward

6.1 Whilst it is recognised and accepted that any pool closures will have an impact on local schools, communities and sports groups the financial pressure on the Council to make significant savings over the next few years remains a priority.

6.2 The benchmarking information provided in Section 5.11 and 5.12 clearly shows that Falkirk has a generous provision of swimming pools both in terms of population and per secondary school.

6.3 During the consultation exercise and in discussions with stakeholders it is clear that some scope exists for additional income generation particularly in the following activity areas:

- Increasing learn to swim programmes.
- Increasing fees and charges for sports clubs and external organisations who use the pools.

6.4 In addition to potential income generation there are a number of options that have been identified that would make savings:

- reinforce the need to consistently use pool covers on a daily basis.(could reduce energy costs by 10-30%).
- Close or reduce access to the school pools during the school holidays.

6.5 In reviewing the existing proposals the following information has been considered:

- the consultation responses.
- the results of the benchmarking exercises undertaken.
- the financial challenges the Council faces.
- the potential areas identified to generate additional income and additional savings.
- the proximity of alternative pools from the 4 schools affected by the proposal.
- the estimate of potential additional energy costs the Council face over the next few years.
- the current size of the school rolls.
- the Council's target to reduce carbon emissions to meet the 2030 Net Zero target.

6.6 Considering the above, the Director of Children's Services therefore proposes to amend the initial proposal and adopt a phased approach, as set out below:

- Phase 1 – Close Grangemouth HS pool from August 2023.
- Phase 2 – To ensure that Grangemouth HS can adapt their PE curriculum for pupils in 2023/24 and that Sport and Leisure staff can liaise with existing pool user groups to see if alternative venues can be offered.
- Phase 3 – The Director of Children's Services assesses how Phase 2 was progressed and uses that information to allow the other 3 schools

time to plan for future changes to their curricular offer and Sport and Leisure staff to engage with existing users/user groups to see if alternative venues or access to pools can be found.

- Phase 4 – That the Director of Children’s Services uses the following assessment principles to set the future plans for the phased closure of the remaining 3 school pools commencing from August 2024 onwards;
 - the ability of each school to amend their PE curriculum provision.
 - the ability of the Sport and Leisure team to offer or find existing pool users alternative venues.
 - the proximity of the school to alternative pool provision.
 - the size of the school roll.
 - any other relevant local factors.

6.7 The proposal to close the Grangemouth HS pool first was made taking into account the following factors:

- It reflects the schools proximity to pools in Grangemouth Sports Centre and Carronrange HS.
- That Grangemouth HS has the smallest school roll of the 4 schools.
- That Grangemouth HS pool was the last of the 4 pools to be staffed to allow wider community group and public access, mainly due to proximity to the Grangemouth Sports Centre.

7. Implications

Financial

7.1 If the above proposals are agreed then the current £400k budget saving will be re-profiled over 4 years. As outlined in Section 6.5 the additional savings and income will need to be assessed and factored into 4-year savings plan and may result in further changes to the current proposals. This would result in an amended savings profile of:

- 2023/24 £ 100,000 (£ 62,500 pool closure and £37,500 from additional income/savings)
- 2024/25 £ 100,000
- 2025/25 £ 100,000
- 2025/26 £ 100,000
- **Total £ 400,000**

7.2 The Council Budget set for 2023-24 had an estimated saving of £0.250m included for this overall proposal. If the current proposals are agreed, then additional savings of £0.150m would require to be found and agreed, to redress this deficit.

7.3 To help mitigate the financial position the Director of Children’s Services will consider what steps can be taken to generate additional income and reduce operational costs based on the suggestions that were reported from the consultation exercises and progress these as required.

Resources

- 7.4 The Sport and Leisure staff impacted by the Grangemouth HS pool closure would be offered alternative posts within the Division via redeployment. There will be no compulsory redundancies.

Legal

- 7.5 There are no legal considerations or implications in agreeing this proposal, as swimming provision is non-statutory in Scotland.

Risk

- 7.6 The risks highlighted and associated with this proposal are:
- The provision of swimming as part of the PE curriculum in Grangemouth HS would have to be considered.
 - The user groups that currently access Grangemouth HS pool would need to be supported to see if an alternative venue can be found.

Equalities

- 7.7 A full Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) has been completed in relation to this proposal for each of the individual pools affected. The EPIAs can be accessed using this link <https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/spr>

In addition, an analysis of the 449 responses that were received via the Strategic Property Review regarding proposed swimming pool closures identified that 412 of these were from individuals/groups that fell within protected characteristic groups. These are summarised in the undernoted table:

Pool Venue	Protected Characteristic Groups					
	Age	Gender	Disability	Poverty	Equality	Total
All school pools comment	13	0	6	7	1	27
Braes High School	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bo'ness Recreation Centre	2	0	0	0	0	2
Falkirk High School	26	0	7	45	0	78
Graeme High School	24	0	0	2	0	26
Grangemouth High School	5	0	0	1	0	6
Larbert High School	242	1	11	17	1	272
No specific pool mentioned	0	0	1	0	0	1
Grand Total	312	1	25	72	2	412

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 7.8 The total amount of carbon emitted because of our operational energy usage in school swimming pools is 1722 tonnes of CO₂e. If the proposals for rationalisation of secondary school swimming pools is agreed, the potential carbon saving would be around 766 tCO₂e.

- 7.9 Consistent use of pool covers across all schools will reduce both evaporation and the need for high ventilation rates and the level of chemicals needed. This would increase energy efficiency.
- 7.10 Current forecasts from Energy Management Team indicate potential cost increases year on year of 30% for electricity and 153% for gas.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The closure of any asset is never a decision that is made lightly, hence the reason why the Council previously agreed to undertake a substantial and wide consultation exercise under the auspices of the Strategic Property Review.
- 8.2 One of the outcomes arising from this exercise was to undertake further engagement and assessment work with stakeholders and this report confirms the feedback that has been received from that.
- 8.3 Children's Services view is that the amended proposals associated with the initial proposals are pragmatic and they proactively allow time for the suggested income generation options to be fully assessed before progressing any of the further phases of possible pool closures.

Director of Children's Service

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Appendices:

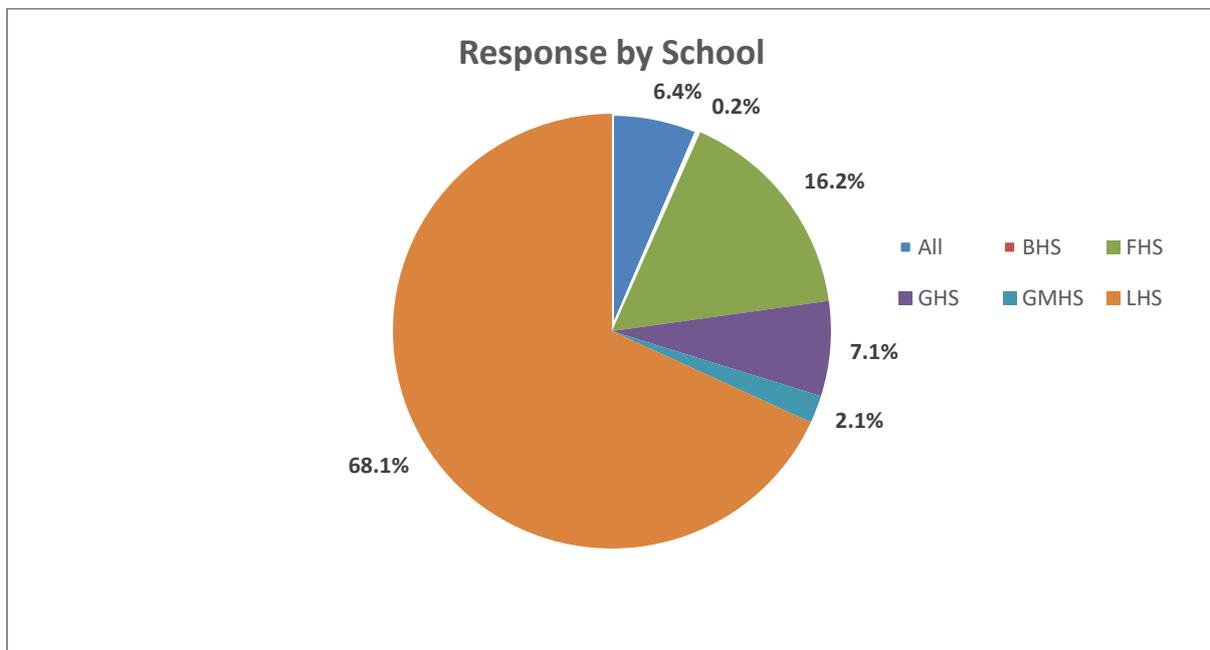
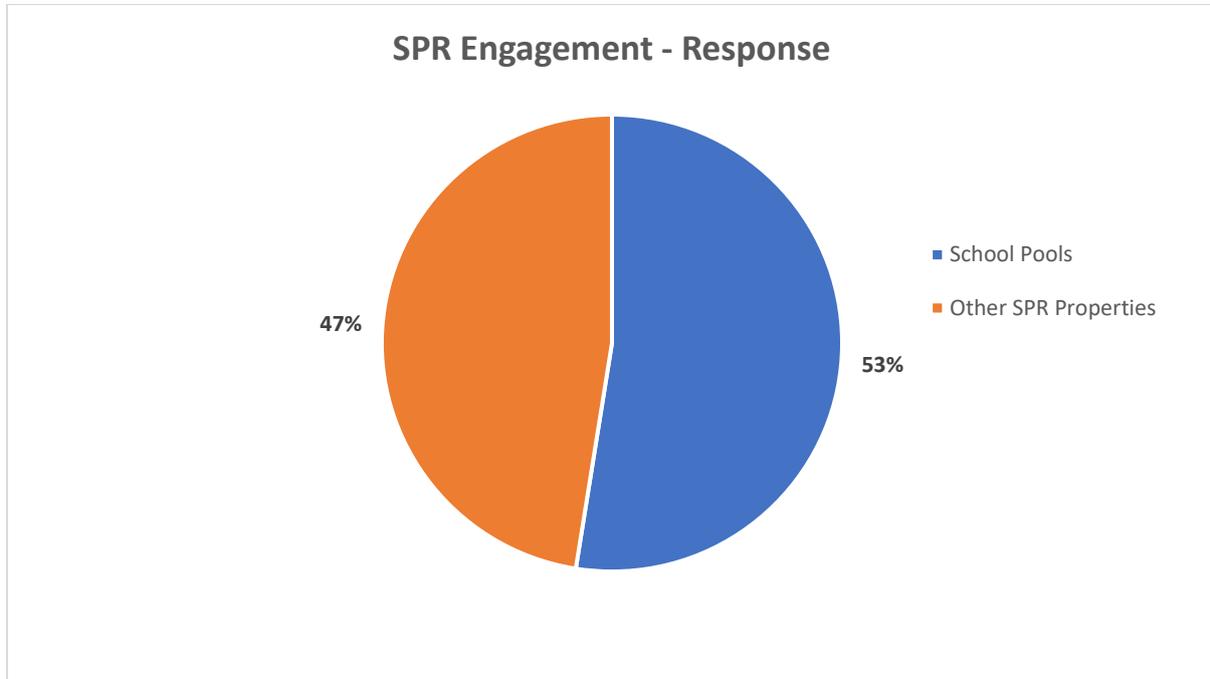
Appendix 1 - Summary and Analysis of Consultation Responses
Appendix 2 - Community Access to School Pools
Appendix 3 - Falkirk Swimming Pool Information

List of Background Papers:

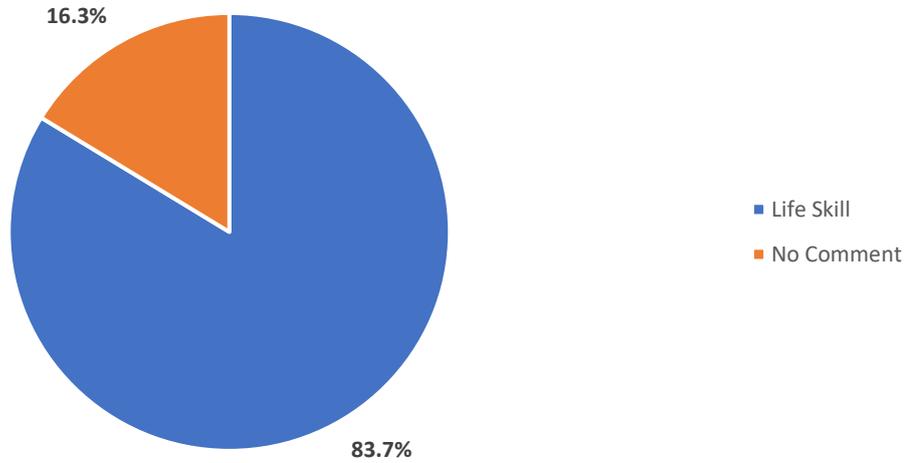
None

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

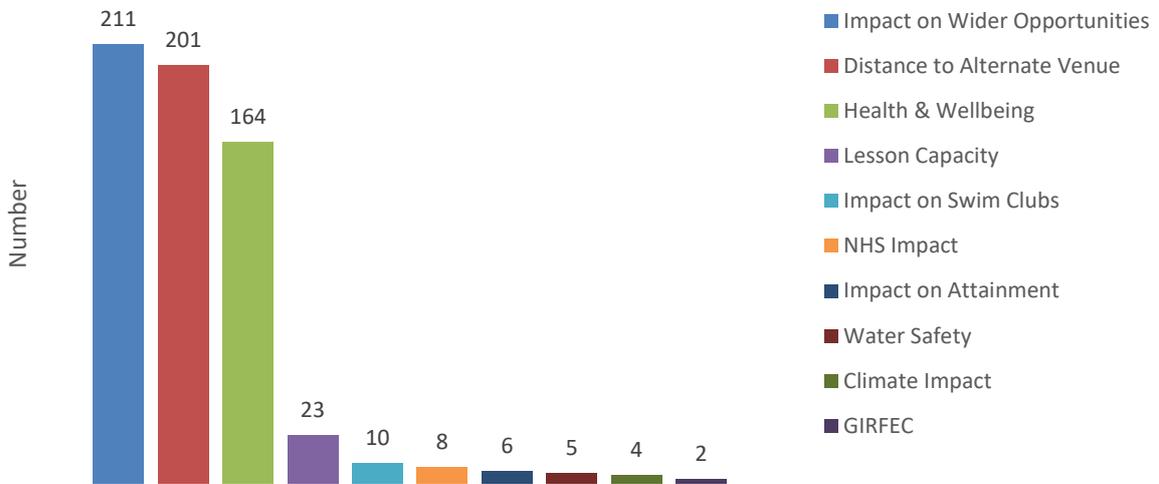
855 responses were received as part of the SPR consultation covering all properties including the school swimming pools.



Percentage of respondents who considered swimming a life skill



Areas of concern raised in SPR Engagement



Appendix 2

Community Access to School Pools								
School		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bo'ness Academy	Available Time	17:00 - 20:30	17:00 - 20:30	17:00 - 20:30	17:00 - 20:30	17:00 - 20:30		Closed
	Private Lets						2	
	Clubs	1	1	1	1	1		
	FC Swim Lessons							
	Public Swim							
Braes High School	Available Time	17:00 - 21:30	17:00 - 21:30	17:00 - 21:30	17:00 - 21:30	17:00 - 21:30		
	Private Lets							2
	Clubs			1				
	FC Swim Lessons	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	Public Swim	1	1		1	1		
Carrongrange High School	Available Time	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
	Private Lets							
	Clubs							
	FC Swim Lessons							
	Public Swim							
Denny High School	Available Time	18:00 - 21:30	18:00 - 21:30	18:00 - 21:30	18:00 - 21:30	18:00 - 21:30		
	Private Lets				1			1
	Clubs	3		1				
	FC Swim Lessons		1			1	1	
	Public Swim	1		1		1		
Falkirk High School	Available Time	18:00 - 21:00	18:00 - 21:00	18:00 - 21:00	18:00 - 21:00	18:00 - 21:00	Closed	Closed
	Private Lets							
	Clubs	1	1	1	1	1		
	FC Swim Lessons							
	Public Swim							
Graeme High School	Available Time	16:00 - 20:30	16:00 - 20:30	16:00 - 20:30	16:00 - 20:30	16:00 - 20:30		Closed
	Private Lets	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	Clubs							
	FC Swim Lessons							
	Public Swim							

Grangemouth High School	Available Time	16:00 - 21:00		Closed				
	Private Lets							
	Clubs	1	1	1	1	2	1	
	FC Swim Lessons							
	Public Swim							
Larbert High School	Available Time	15:30 - 21:00		Closed				
	Private Lets	1	2	3	1	1	1	
	Clubs	1	1	0	1	2		
	FC Swim Lessons						1	
	Public Swim							
St Mungo's High School	Available Time	18:00 - 21:30	Closed	Closed				
	Private Lets							
	Clubs							
	FC Swim Lessons	1	1	1	1	1		
	Public Swim	1		1		1		

FALKIRK SWIMMING POOLS – KEY INFORMATION

<u>SPORT & LEISURE POOLS</u>	<u>Pool Type</u>	<u>Operated by</u>	CURRENT POOL AVAILABILITY		
Bo'ness Recreation Centre	Community	Council	Mon – Fri: 07:30 – 21:00		Sat/Sun: 09:00 – 16:30
Grangemouth Sports Centre	Community	Council	Mon / Wed / Fri 09.00 – 21.00 Tues / Thurs 07.15 – 21.00		Sat/Sun: 09:00 – 17:00
Mariner Sports Centre	Leisure	Council	Mon – Fri: 09:00 – 20:30		Sat/Sun: 09:00 – 16:30
<u>SCHOOL POOLS</u>			School Day	After School	Weekend
Carrongrange High School	School	Council	N (Used by School)	N/A	N/A
Bo'ness Academy	School	Class of 98	N (Used by School)	Up to 21:15 (via lets)	09:00 – 12:00 (Sat only – via lets)
Braes High School	School	Class of 98	N (Used by School)	17:00 – 21:45	09:00 – 12:45 (Sat & Sun)
Graeme High School	School	Class of 98	N (Used by School)	Up to 21:15 (via lets)	09:00 – 12:00 (Sat only – via lets)
Larbert High School	School	Class of 98	N (Used by School)	15.30 – 20.30	08.30 – 16.30 (Sat only)
Denny High School	School	FES FM	N (Used by School)	18.00 – 21.00	09:00 – 13:00 (Sat & Sun)
Falkirk High School	School	FES FM	N (Used by School)	17.30 – 21.00	N/A
Grangemouth High School	School	FES FM	N (Used by School)	16.00 – 21.00	10.00 – 16.00 (Sat Only)
St Mungo's School	School	FES FM	N (Used by School)	17.30 – 21.30	N/A