

# Parents join call for free pool access

## Issue on council agenda



**Jade Ginnane**

HAMILTON South mother Alethea Parkinson is one of many local parents pleased that several newly-elected Newcastle councillors are pushing for free entry into the city's pools.

For the past two summers, Mrs Parkinson opted to drive her four children to the Maitland Aquatic Centre to save money.

An annual family pass for Maitland pool costs \$363, compared to \$518 at Mayfield or \$623 at Lambton.

"There were times we would be at Maitland pool every day over the summer - it was cheaper to drive there [and pay for their annual pass] than to get an annual pool pass closer to home," Mrs Parkinson said.

She said it was important that her children could swim and could practise regularly.

"Swimming pools in the community

need to be accessible," she said.

Newcastle City Council's 2010-11 financial records show its pools made \$980,000, but the five facilities - Mayfield, Beresfield, Lambton, Stockton and Wallsend - cost the council more than \$5 million a year to operate.

Re-elected councillor Nuatali Nelmes said there was no way the costs would break even but offering free access to the facilities would encourage usage.

Cr Nelmes said the present practice of paying a contractor to collect money had room for improvement and she suggested each pool could devise new methods to raise revenue.

"Leasing cafes and kiosks or hiring out services such as lanes, equipment and even swimming instructors are all ideas," she said.

"We need to have open entry like we do at ocean pools; it is about providing the same services to all ratepayers."

Cr Nelmes said she would raise the issue when council meetings resumed later this month.



**HOPEFUL:** Alethea Parkinson and her four children outside Mayfield Pool - from left Carter, 3, Kayla, 7, Mishka, 4, and Jasper, 9.

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**By Jade Ginnane**

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