

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

REPORT TO CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9TH NOVEMBER 2011

LEISURE CONCESSIONS REVIEW REPORT OF COMMUNITY & LEISURE SERVICE DELIVERY MANAGER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To appraise Members in respect of the current Leisure Services Concessions Policy and the Arthog Outdoor Education Centre Remissions Policy and to seek Members views in respect of potential options for the revision of the schemes.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council currently affords free or discounted access to a range of sports and leisure activities for a number of concessionary groups as defined in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The Leisure Services review carried out by independent consultants and the subsequent Cabinet report recommended a review of the current Concessions Policy and identified a notional saving of £50k. A proposed saving of £50k arising from a review of the current concessions scheme has been included within the Leisure Services non staff savings proposals for 2012/13.
- 2.3 The Council also operates a remissions scheme in respect of Arthog Outdoor Education Centre (Appendix 3) which provides fully funded places for children from qualifying families. A recent complaint has raised questions as to the 'fairness' of the current scheme.

3. LEISURE CONCESSIONS

- 3.1 The purpose of the concessions scheme is to provide equality of access to the Council's sports & leisure activities for those groups that may be considered to be financially disadvantaged.
- 3.2 The Council does in addition to the concessions scheme offer targeted leisure and physical activity provision for hard to reach groups through commissioned projects, external funding and sponsorship. This provision typically targets hard to reach and low participation groups. Current projects include:
 - I Can Too (free activities for disabled children)
 - Fit 4 Life Scheme (reduced price activities for referred users)
 - Inclusive Leisure (support for disabled adults to access activities)
 - Active Families (funded activities for inactive families)

- Physical Activity reward Scheme (activities for 13-19 year olds)
 - Kidz 4 A Quid (subsidised holiday activity programme)
 - Tackle Your Health (health screening and activities for men)
- 3.3 The concessions scheme is administered through the Flex Card which allows for secure and accurate capture of data. The concessions card is visibly indistinguishable from non concessionary cards.
- 3.4 Leisure is a discretionary service and as such there is no statutory requirement to provide services or to offer a concessions scheme. Concessionary entitlement is currently open to residents only, with the exception of Disabled card holders where residency is not currently a requirement.
- 3.5 A breakdown of current concessionary card ownership is included within Appendix 1. Whilst the entitlement criteria is consistent across the service the level of discount applied differs. For example the over 60's are entitled to free swimming and off peak skating and skiing whilst the level of discount for golf is less than 20% and excludes weekend usage.
- 3.6 Concessionary discounts are not currently available on block bookings or group activities.
- 3.7 Telford & Wrekin registered Foster Carers are also currently afforded concessionary status.
- 3.8 Concessionary schemes vary greatly across local authorities and direct comparisons are not easy, however the current Telford & Wrekin scheme is considered to be generous.
- 3.9 **Potential Options**
- 3.9.1 Consideration could be given as to revising the current criteria for concessions for example Senior Citizens particularly given the increasing retirement age, projected growth in the 60 plus population within Telford & Wrekin and the fact that the entitlement is not means tested; revising the level of concessions, or a combination of the two.
- 3.9.2 If the option to review automatic entitlement for residents over 60 were to be considered it is important to note that senior citizens in receipt of Pension Credit would still qualify for concessionary status.
- 3.9.3 Leisure fees and charges are reviewed annually under delegated authority to the Head of Service in consultation with the respective Cabinet Member. The issue of which groups are afforded concessionary status is something that is likely to have wider implications across the Council. As such one option might be to introduce/review leisure related charges for the currently defined concessionary groups, whilst a wider review be undertaken in respect of which groups the Council affords concessionary status. This would ensure consistency and fairness across Council services.

- 3.9.4 Swimming and Health & Fitness represent by far and away the most popular concessionary activities. Details in respect of concessionary admissions and potential income modelling for these activities are provided in Appendix 2. The figures exclude junior concessionary swimming following the reinstatement of free public swimming for residents aged under 16.
- 3.9.5 Clearly any revisions that result in the introduction of or increase in charges may result in reduced admissions and impact more widely upon community physical activity levels.
- 3.9.6 Any proposed changes would need to be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

4. ARTHOG REMISSIONS POLICY

- 4.1 Arthog Outdoor Education Centre primarily provides residential outdoor education opportunities for schools. The current cost of a 5 day residential course for Telford & Wrekin pupil ranges from £228 to £263 depending upon the term.
- 4.2 The purpose of the Remissions Policy is to ensure that no child should be denied access to Arthog because of financial hardship.
- 4.3 As with Leisure Services there is no statutory requirement to provide the service. Legislation does however apply in respect of charging and remissions policies for LEA's and Grant Maintained Schools. In 2010/11 the Council funded 514 pupil places through the scheme.
- 4.4 Shropshire Council also run a similar scheme in respect of pupils visiting Arthog, although it is understood that this is currently under review. If removed this could represent a significant financial risk to Arthog and therefore the Council. Remissions income from Shropshire schools totalled £68k in 2010/11.
- 4.5 A recent complaint from a Telford & Wrekin parent raised concerns in respect of the fact that they considered it unfair that pupils were either required to pay the full fee or nothing.
- 4.6 **Potential Options**
- 4.6.1 The Council could consider reducing the level of subsidy per pupil therefore requiring a contribution from families who meet the remissions criteria for example £50. As with the leisure concessions scheme this would need to be balanced against the risk of excluding individuals and the resulting financial impact on the Arthog budget.
- 4.6.2 The Council could elect to consider a sliding scale of entitlement linked to wholly or partially funded places, however this is likely to prove difficult to administer and complicated for parents and schools. No matter what system

is put in place to help disadvantaged families there will always be families who fall just outside the criteria.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended that Members give consideration to the report and a steer as to how they would like to see this work progressed.