

CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 12th September, 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors A. McClements (Chairman), N. England, A. Jhawar, J. Loveridge, K. Tomlinson; Scrutiny Co-optee L. Baker-Oliver.

Also Present: Councillors C. Smith, A. England; Corin Crane, Enterprise and Employment Manager; Andrew Meredith, Customer Services Manager; Peter Smith Head of Economy and Skills; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist; Tracy Clarke, Scrutiny Officer; Wendy Buckley, Democratic Services Support Officer.

CCSC-5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Cllrs K. Guy, T. Hope.

CCSC-6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CCSC-7 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was noted that Cllr Davies had offered to return to the Committee to discuss the Co- operative Council communication campaign should the members wish.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on the 25th July 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CCSC-8 FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

The Enterprise and Employment Manager presented the report on First Point for Business which highlighted a need for a single point of contact for businesses to effectively access Council services.

In the recent Local Economic Assessment, local businesses highlighted the need for a one stop approach.

The report detailed the range of services that the Council offers to local businesses and highlighted that although there are pockets of excellence the provision is patchy, with too many access points, differing service standards and opening hours. At any one time it is possible that 4 or 5 different departments will be dealing with the same business with no communication between them. There is a concern that this may

mean that businesses do not use the services available which may lead to unsatisfied customers or worse still a missed opportunity to help a business locate or expand in Telford.

Currently businesses contact services directly but it is felt that 80- 90% of the current calls could be dealt with at the first point of call or online. This would allow experienced officers more time to deal with in depth issues with businesses.

In order for the single point of contact to be a success it is essential that there is strong corporate leadership from a senior level to support the programme.

There are currently no financial resources available for the initial set up of the Customer Service Centre which will be reliant on the support of staff from other services such as Planning and Environmental Services to be trained as the first point of contact for businesses.

The aim of the programme is to enhance the Council's relationship with businesses by seeking to improve its customer service through:

- A commitment to user focus and citizen engagement
- Understanding our communities
- Clarity of Purpose
- Communication in appropriate ways; and
- Delivering change and improved outcomes.

To summarise the key points for consideration are

1. Identifying the need: In order to develop and deliver a customer service strategy for businesses, we need to consult with local businesses to identify their need and deliver an appropriate strategy.
2. Develop quick, focused customer service strategy for business: This needs to take a corporate approach, with strong leadership and that is owned and embedded across the organisation as a whole.
3. Develop a costed, timetabled proposal: This involves an assessment of our current resources in order to develop a cost neutral strategy with options to be considered such as shared ownership of the CRM system.

The committees experience of small businesses was that dealing with the council can be frustrating because it can be difficult to get a response back.

A number of questions were asked by the committee.

Q How will Businesses be consulted to get feedback on the Council?

A. There are currently 6 or 7 existing business networks that could be initially contacted and a further 700 – 800 businesses that could be contacted with follow up surveys or questionnaires.

Q. Is there an IT system that could be used as there are no resources available?

A. There are a number of IT systems used across the council. One Telford currently uses Evolutive which could be used but another system may be more appropriate.

An intelligent system such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) could resolve a significant number of enquiries at the first point of contact thus saving officer time. A number of options will be looked at but the final choice will be subject to the resources available and the feedback from businesses.

A further option is that this could be achieved through a staged approach.

Q. What will happen with the more detailed enquiries such as businesses with planning issues?

A. The contact centre will refer the enquiry to the relevant team and will monitor the response time to the enquiry.

Q. Are there any examples of best practice in other Authorities?

A. Research has been completed and the only examples of where a First Point Model has been used is for residential enquiries. There are currently no examples for business that have been found, so this could be the first of its kind.

Q. What kind of leadership do you envisage?

A. The programme needs to be lead from the top to ensure that this is successful.

This is about changing the culture and not just about implementing a new system.

Q. It is a good idea to have one point of contact but how far can we go with the existing resources?

A. At the moment a number of options are being considered. Once the businesses have been able to say what they want from the Council then a suitable model will be developed. This will involve completing a detailed costed plan.

Q. Is there a timetable for the programme?

A. The timetable would depend on what is needed to be delivered and there may be barriers to change. The programme could take 6 – 12 months to implement.

Q. It is important to develop a profile of businesses and their needs. What does the Local Assessment show?

A. Advantage West Midlands funded the research which highlighted 3 key issues

1. Access to Finance
2. Access to Council Services
3. Access to Procurement between Businesses

Q. Did any of the research identify the need for a one stop approach?

A. Businesses tend to call known officers who they deem to be reliable. At times it has become evident that not all of the relevant information is passed onto prospective businesses, which leads to confusion and lost opportunities. An example is that the social enterprise project in Donnington was not aware that they were eligible for 90% discount on their rates and were initially dissuaded from setting up.

Q. How will the Contact Centre be staffed as they will need to have a good understanding of business needs to ensure that they give out the correct information.

A. A potential model is that there could be six people in the Contact Centre who would be trained to deal with the majority of routine enquiries and refer complex calls to the appropriate officers and then review enquiries 48 hours later. The One Telford team are already business focussed but there would need to be an ongoing CPD programme to ensure that the team have adequate legislative and Best Practice knowledge.

Q. What job satisfaction will there be for the staff?

A. It is not advocated that the staff are just in a Call Centre as this leads to a high turnover of staff. The staff will be trained to meet with businesses and have face to face contact.

Q. Do you identify the business needs first or the level of funding? The problem could be that there is a chance that you raise the expectation of the businesses but then cannot meet these expectations.

A. There initially needs to be contact with the businesses and they need to be provided with a range of options to consider but this can be marketed as a programme that is being developed.

The model would need to make savings so we would need to consider the cost savings in officer's time.

Q. How will the programme be measured?

A. Within the project, milestones will be set and these will be monitored to check that they are achieved. The measures will need to be qualitative and at the moment they still need to be identified.

There are currently around 10,000 Business calls a year. With a CRM system we would be able to monitor how many calls are being referred to individual service teams and how many are dealt with at the first point of contact.

Q. Who will be responsible for overseeing the project?

A. The Governance structure will need to be developed. Furthermore, a strong project board will be needed to oversee the delivery of the project and the attainment of key milestones.

Q. The Enterprise and Employment Manager asked the members if they had any feedback on the Businesses they work for.

A. A member replied that having worked with a small business, the Council's reputation could be better. There had sometimes been confusion about services and also businesses are not always called back and updated.

The cabinet member said this was an early paper that needs to be considered and further expanded.

- All council departments need to be working together to make this a success and part of the key to this is internal conversation.
- Support needs to be provided to small and medium enterprises, potential investors and new start up who may currently find it difficult to find out who to contact.
- The paper also needs to address firms potentially relocating in Telford. The one point of contact is ideal because businesses can be assured that someone will get back to them.

Q. Where do start up businesses currently get their support from?

A. The funding has been cut from Advantage West Midlands and Business Link so One Telford is already getting enquiries from start ups.

At 7.10pm the Cabinet Member left the meeting.

The Members discussed the information that had been given and made a number of points.

- Concerns were initially raised that there is no benchmarking available from other authorities. This could also be considered a positive because this could give the Council an opportunity to lead the way.
- The cost and the resources required for the project.
- The programme leadership, which needs to be strong and have the support of each Council department.
- The performance measures which need to be decided. This includes both quantitative and qualitative measures.

It was agreed that further scrutiny was necessary and that the Committee would make recommendations to Cabinet that the Council sets up a single point of contact for businesses based on the First Point Model.

RESOLVED

- **That the Committee would make recommendations to Cabinet to set up a single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**
- **That a report and wording for the recommendations would be drafted by the Scrutiny Team and circulated to the Committee for comment and approval.**

CCSC-9 Information requested at the previous meeting had been provided

There were no further questions but with regards to the Co-operative Council Communications Strategy the Chairman suggested that a clear guide for both Members and the Public would be beneficial.

Furthermore, it was noted that Members would have the opportunity to ask questions at the Scrutiny Management Board the following day.

CCSC-10 Forward Plan

The Committee noted the next meeting of 10th October is a Special Interest Meeting to discuss the Concessions in Leisure.

The meeting ended at 7.28p.m.

Chairman:

Date:

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.

Appendix 1

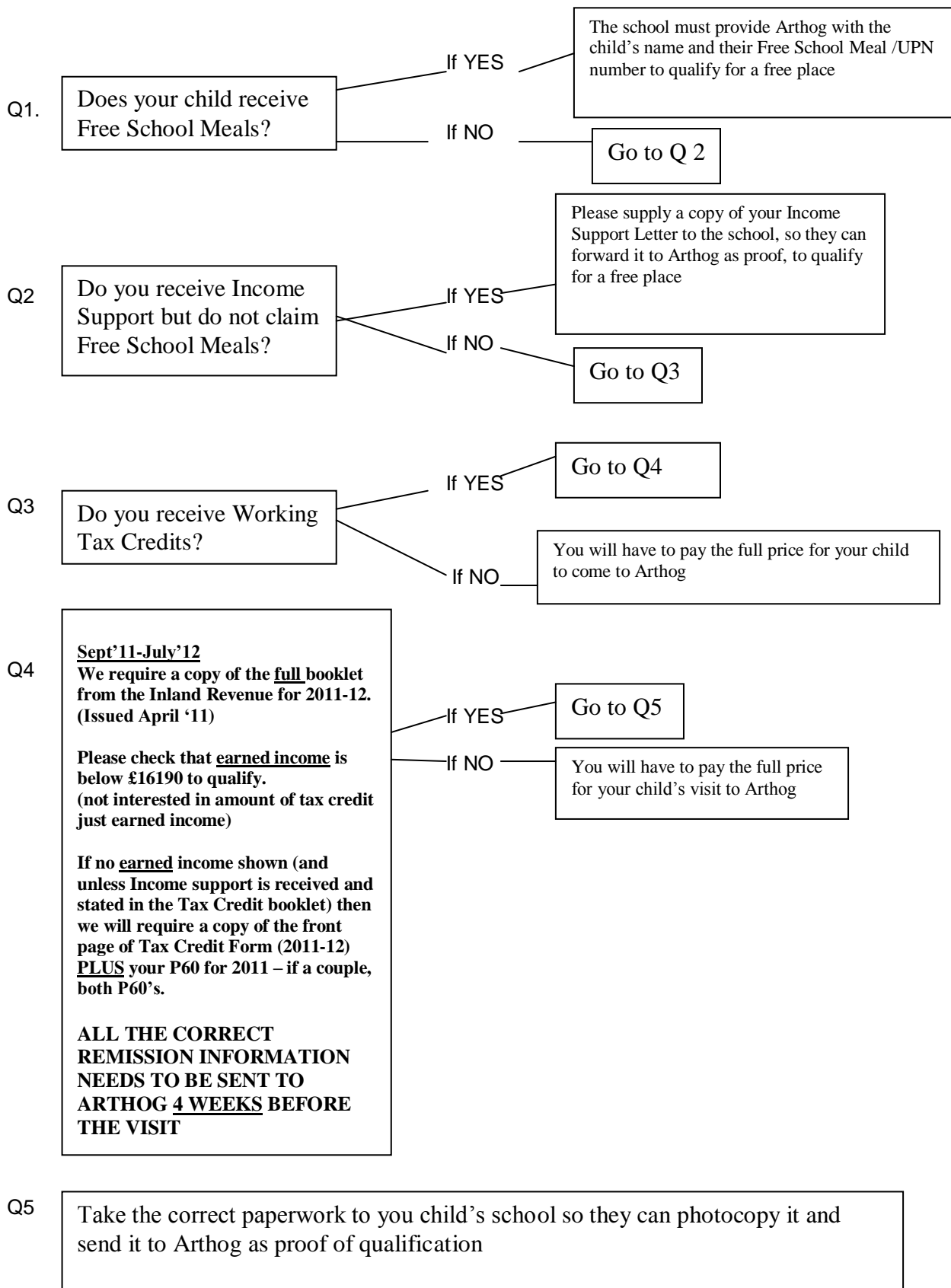
Concessionary Groups

Group	Definition	Number of Cardholders	Entitlement
1	People/families in receipt of Council Tax Benefit, Pension Credit, Leaving Care Allowance, free school meals or Healthy Start Vouchers	2,482 adults 1,710 junior	Free Swimming and off peak skating. Up to 40% discount on other non instructed activities and up to 25% off non-instructed activities.
2	People in receipt of one or more of the following: Employment and Support Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance, Disabled Persons Tax Credit, Industrial Disablement, Attendance Allowance, Mobility Allowance.	598	Free Swimming and off peak skating. Up to 40% discount on other non instructed activities and up to 25% off non-instructed activities. Above also applies to an accompanying carer.
3	People in receipt of Carers Allowance.	Included within group 1	Free Swimming and off peak skating. Up to 40% discount on other non instructed activities and up to 25% off non-instructed activities.
4	60+	2,459	Free Swimming and off peak skating. Up to 40% discount on other non instructed activities and up to 25% off non-instructed activities.
5	Full time students aged 16 and over	916	Admission at Junior rates.

Appendix 3

Remission of fees for 2011/12 Guidance for Course Leaders & Parents

Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire maintain a policy that no child should be denied access to Arthog because of financial hardship. This is the Remission Policy. The following step by step guide tells you if you are eligible and how to claim. Remissions only apply Monday – Friday, and for term time courses.



Appendix 2 Concessions Modelling

Swimming Concession Modelling

	Admissions	Full Price	Half Price	£1
Adult	15406	£50,069.50	£25,034.75	£15,406.00
Seniors	22042	£71,636.50	£35,818.25	£22,042.00
TOTAL	37448	£121,706.00	£60,853.00	£37,448.00
10% drop in visits	33703	£109,534.75	£53,924.80	£33,703.00
15% drop in visits	31830	£103,447.50	£50,928.00	£31,830.00
25% drop in visits	28086	£91,279.50	£44,937.60	£28,086.00
50% drop in visits	18724	£60,853.00	£29,958.40	£18,724.00
75% drop in visits	9362	£30,426.50	£14,979.20	£9,362.00

Adults - £3.25

Health & Fitness Membership Concession Modelling

Direct Debit	No.	Monthly Rate	Annual Income	Full Rate	Annual Income @ Full Rate	Additional Annual Income
Current	240	£16.00	£46,080.00	£26.00	£74,880.00	£28,800.00
	433	£21.00	£109,116.00	£26.00	£135,096.00	£25,980.00
					TOTAL	£54,780.00
10% drop in membership	216			£26.00	£67,392.00	£21,312.00
	389			£26.00	£121,368.00	£12,252.00
						£33,564.00
25% drop in membership	180			£26.00	£56,160.00	£9,080.00
	324			£26.00	£101,088.00	-£8,028.00
					TOTAL	£1,052.00
50% drop in membership	120			£26.00	£37,440.00	-£8,640.00
	216			£26.00	£67,392.00	-£41,724.00

						-£50,364.00
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