

Scrutiny Committee Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Economy, Leisure and Property

Author: Kate Arnold

Tel: 01491 823091

E-mail: kate.arnold@southandvale.gov.uk

Cabinet Member responsible: Bill Service

Tel: 01235 510810

E-mail: bill.service@southoxon.gov.uk

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AGENDA ITEM NO

4

Review of community leisure card scheme

Recommendation

That the committee is invited to comment on the performance of the community leisure card scheme following its first year of operation.

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to give the committee an opportunity to consider the performance of the community leisure card scheme following its first year of operation, and to pass any comments about the scheme to the cabinet member for leisure so that he can take them into account before making any further adjustments to the scheme.

Strategic objectives

2. The community leisure card scheme helps to ensure that the council is achieving its strategic objectives and corporate priorities, particularly the following:
strategic objective 1: managing our business effectively, and corporate priority MB1: provide value for money services that meet the needs of our residents and service users – the launch of the leisure card provides various options for users to consider in order to ensure they gain the best price for the leisure activities they choose to participate in, depending on their individual preferences.
strategic objective 1: managing our business effectively, and corporate priority

MB2: provide equality of access to our services – the higher discount option on the leisure card enables those on lower incomes to access the leisure facilities.

strategic objective 6: helping people feel safe and secure, and corporate priority FS2: maintain low levels of fear of crime and antisocial behaviour - structured leisure activities can divert people from crime and anti-social behaviour - those participating in regular physical activity tend to have a lower fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

strategic objective 7: improving opportunities, activities and support for young people and corporate priority YP1: - increase access to a wide range of activities for young people, which meet their needs; and support young people at risk of committing antisocial behaviours and crime - by ensuring that the contractor provides a varied programme of activities, we aim to provide a range of opportunities for young people enabling them to participate in regular physical activity as well as providing diversionary activities, which can reduce antisocial behaviour and crime.

Background

3. When the committee considered the adoption of the community leisure card scheme in July 2009, it requested that a report on the first year of the scheme was brought back to the committee for consideration.
4. The South Oxfordshire community leisure card was introduced in September 2009 and was devised to meet the following objectives:
 - increase usage of and satisfaction with our leisure centres on a continuous basis
 - ensure equality/affordability of access to leisure
 - effective engagement and targeting of new users
 - removal of price barriers
 - collection of meaningful usage data.
5. Prior to the introduction of the community leisure card, there was no standard approach to pricing across the district; and memberships were centre specific and not available at some centres. Concessionary benefits were limited to swimming and were available only to those in receipt of the following benefits:
 - child tax credit income support
 - council tax refund
 - disability living allowance
 - disabled person's tax credit
 - housing benefit
 - incapacity benefit

- jobseekers allowance
- working tax credit.

6. The main changes arising from the launch of the leisure card included:

- the exclusion of child tax credit from, and the inclusion of pension tax credit to, the list of means-tested eligibility criteria for the free community leisure card
- the principle of introducing discounted off-peak activity charges for holders of the free community leisure card, rather than providing a weekly free swim at restricted off-peak hours
- the 'standard discount' rate of some 30 per cent at any time and the 'free card discount' of some 50 per cent at off-peak times, both of which form part of the pay as you go offer
- the rationalisation of prices across the centres.

7. A year after the introduction of the community leisure card, this review considers the implementation and launch of the card along with any issues that arose. Further, it identifies changes made to the scheme, performance to date and finally identifies further suggested developments for the scheme.

Implementation

8. Prior to the launch of the community leisure card, the total membership across all sport and leisure centres in South Oxfordshire was 6,329. This was made up of 1,904 leisure pass holders and 4,425 pre-paid gym members.

9. The community leisure card was designed and implemented to be attractive to regular and irregular users and allow engagement with target groups within the local community. After 12 months operation, the new scheme had a total of 12,588 members with 4,552 loyalty card holders, 3,179 pay as you go card holders and 4,847 pre-paid card holders (see appendix 1 attached to this briefing note for the breakdown of members).

10. The transition to the new scheme was a comparatively simple process with GLL / Nexus staff training and marketing schemes focussed on selling the benefits of the new card to existing and potential users. To avoid potentially large queues building up at reception whilst old cards were replaced, GLL / Nexus programmed additional staff to work over the transition period. Despite this, problems did arise at some centres.

Park Sports Centre and Didcot Leisure Centre

11. Pre-paid members of the previous scheme operated by SOLL benefited from free racquet sport bookings at Park Sports Centre and Didcot Leisure Centre.

12. The community leisure card offers free racquet sports for pre-paid members as long as they are not pre-booked. The withdrawal of the pre-booking facility resulted in a number of complaints at both centres. Objections were particularly

strong at Didcot Leisure Centre where a compromise solution is currently being worked through with members. This may result in a new membership category for pre-paid members only wanting to play squash and/or badminton, which would be applied across all sites.

Didcot Wave

13. The initial implementation of the new card scheme went well, even though there was not a 'pay as you go' membership available previously. However, an unforeseen problem arose with the re-enrolment of the swimming courses in late September. The standalone swimming course management package used by GLL / Nexus at the Wave printed renewal slips with the non-member price increase of 50 per cent. The new under 14 membership, which offered no increase in the course price (£5 per session) and other advantages, such as unlimited free casual swimming, was poorly communicated and resulted in a significant number of complaints. Additional staff were made available to advise customers about the changes as part of the action plan referred to in paragraph 13 below and feedback 12 months on is that the under 14 membership is extremely popular and well received by parents and children.

Customer feedback

14. Between September and December 2009, 50 complaints were received by the council relating to the introduction of the leisure card. As the majority of the issues and complaints were focused, for very different reasons, on Didcot, an action plan was agreed and implemented to generate positive publicity for Didcot Wave and Didcot Leisure Centre.
15. It had been anticipated that the removal of child tax credit as an eligible benefit for concessionary cards would result in numerous complaints from customers. In fact, only one comment was received regarding this.
16. Seven comments were received about the removal of free swimming from those eligible for higher discount 'pay as you go' card holders, whilst 17 complaints were received regarding the perceived increase in swimming lesson prices, which was in fact due to a miscommunication of the scheme.
17. No feedback was received regarding the name of the scheme.

Performance

18. The initial success of the community leisure card can be assessed against the key objectives:
- effective engagement and targeting of new users
 - removal of price barriers
 - collection of meaningful usage data.
19. The growth in membership from 6,329 to 12,588 in 12 months is pleasing to note with detailed usage data now available for 100 per cent of users. Perhaps more importantly, 328 cards were issued to targeted individuals/groups (see table

below) and we are now able to assess the benefit and value of this programme by analysing usage statistics and patterns.

Targeted individuals / groups	Number of cards issued
GO Active Activators	58
South Oxfordshire Youth Games participants	150
The Vibe Youth Club (Didcot)	30
Looked after children	18
Health promotion	72

20. In terms of removing price barriers, pay as you go cards are free to individuals in receipt of the following benefits and entitle the user to a 50 per cent discount on most activities:

- council tax rebate
- disabled persons tax credit
- employment and support allowance
- housing benefit
- income support
- job seeker allowance
- pension tax credit
- working tax credit.

21. The number of higher discount cards issued to the end of August was 526. At 4.2 per cent of the total membership base, this figure would appear to be low and in need of improvement. The delivery target for this category of membership for the period April 2010 to March 2011 is a 50 per cent increase and a target of over 1,000 higher discount members has been set for 2014. Targets for all categories of membership are detailed in appendix 1.

22. Whilst the basic design of the scheme has not been amended since its introduction, changes were made to the target populations to include a new category of benefit - employment and support allowance. Amendments will continue to be made to the eligible benefits for concessionary cards as changes are made following the comprehensive spending review and other reviews.

23. Along with an increased focus on GO Active and health promotion schemes, GLL / Nexus have also been working with Oxfordshire County Council's direct payment scheme and the police's priority and prolific offender scheme and have arrangements in place to accommodate those identified by these organisations.

Conclusion

24. The introduction of the community leisure card scheme has had a significant impact on the collection of meaningful data, engagement of targeted users and the removal of price barriers. This provides the benefit of enabling GLL/Nexus to communicate more effectively with members, such as updating centre opening times during adverse weather conditions, as well as tracking activities/days/times that are particularly successful or unsuccessful.
25. In 12 months the membership base grew by just under 100 per cent and 328 targeted individuals were encouraged to take part in physical activity through the direct delivery of the community leisure card by activators and others in the local community. Usage of the leisure facilities for physical activity increased by 5.5 per cent in 2009/10 (734,600 visits) and a further increase in use of 0.8 per cent was recorded for April 2010 - September 2010. Members of the scrutiny committee are invited to comment on the performance of the community leisure scheme during its first year.
26. Further work is needed to develop the scheme, targeting more effectively the general population who are entitled to free higher discount cards, and more closely fit the membership types to the needs of the local community, such as a squash-only membership. It was agreed when the community leisure card was adopted that any involvement of Cornerstone with the scheme should come at a later date. No further work has been undertaken to progress this.
27. In the future, the scheme will continue to improve and evolve with benefits changing in line with the priorities and needs of South Oxfordshire residents. Members of the scrutiny committee are invited to pass any comments on the scheme to the cabinet member for leisure so that he can take them into account before deciding whether to make any further adjustments to the scheme.

Appendix 1

Community leisure card take up September 2009 - August 2010

	Thame	Park	Abbey	Didcot LC	Didcot W:	Henley	Total
'Loyalty'	1,064	551	248	39	1,761	889	4,552
'Pay As You Go'	641	246	383	175	940	794	3,179
<i>PAYGO Under 16</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>494</i>	<i>304</i>	<i>1,285</i>
<i>PAYGO Adult</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>655</i>
<i>PAYGO Concession</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>258</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>526</i>
<i>PAYGO Student</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>PAYGO 60+</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>PAYGO Family</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>469</i>
Total Prepaid	1,582	384	457	5	1,482	947	4,857
<i>Pre Paid Fitness adult</i>	<i>1,364</i>	<i>377</i>	<i>254</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>672</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>3,379</i>
<i>Pre Paid Swim Only</i>							
<i>Adult</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>340</i>
<i>Pre Paid Under 14's</i>							
<i>(swim lessons plus)</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>658</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>1,138</i>
						Total	12,588

Targets 2011 - 2014

	Actual August 2010	Target April 2011	Target April 2014
Total	12,588	12,552	19,347
Loyalty	4,552	3,089	6,405
Pay as you go 30%	2,736	3,573	5,233
Pay as you go 60%	526	738	1,081
Prepaid Fitness+	3,379	3,678	4,471
Prepaid Swimming only	340	293	428
Prepaid Under 14	1,138	1,181	1,730