

Select Committee Culture and Recreation – 15 September 2005

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Options+ Leisure Card

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Select Committee for Culture & Recreation on the progress with the Options+ Leisure Card Scheme.

Background

2. At its meeting on the 8th September 2003 the Select Committee for Culture & Recreation supported the proposal to replace the existing Key to Leisure Scheme with the new Options+ Scheme. The purpose of the Scheme is to encourage social disadvantaged individuals to take part in leisure activities by making such activities affordable to them.
3. The Cabinet Member for Leisure approved the proposal to launch a new leisure card on 19th November 2003.
4. The Options+ leisure card was launched on 14th June 2004 in conjunction with Men's Health Week and Carer's Week during an event at the Crystal leisure centre.
5. Initially promotional activity was limited while the systems and processes for the new card were tested. From July 2004 to November 2004 the following promotional activity was undertaken:
 - Press releases in local papers
 - Full page advert & editorial in Stourbridge, Dudley & Halesowen News
 - 50 Bus Panel Posters – Merry Hill Mini Buses for 4 weeks
 - Leaflets/Posters out to over 150 distributions points including Jobcentres, Colleges, GP Practices, Health Centres, Estate Offices, Post Offices and Community Centres
 - Press releases in internal newsletters, Dudley Matters, Home Affairs and The Dudley Carer
 - Information mailed directly to all registered Foster Carers
 - Pull up banner displayed at Benefits Shop for 4 weeks
 - Half Page advert in Take Two magazine

6. In March 2005 a flyer promoting the benefits of the Options+ card was included in the Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit renewal notices. These were sent out to over 30,000 homes.
7. Since the last report to Select Committee in January 2005 over 1800 people have joined the leisure card scheme. The total number of cardholders now stands at 3164 an increase of 58% on the old Key to Leisure Scheme. The breakdown of Eligibility Categories, Gender, Ethnicity and Age are shown in Appendices 1-4. The following results have been identified:
 - The new categories targeting carers and people with disabilities make up 19% of the total card holders
 - The percentage of cardholders from ethnic groups other than white British is 10%
 - The gender split is 55% female and 45% male
 - 30% of card holders are under 16 years of age and 10% are over 60
8. Appendix 5 shows the income and usage of the old Key to Leisure Card for July 2003 compared with the Options+ Leisure Card for July 2005 at Crystal leisure centre. The usage has increased by 87% and the income by 220%. This is due to the extension of activities to include fitness suites, fitness classes, sports courses and swimming instruction. These activities account for 48% of the usage and 72% of the income for the leisure card in July 2005.
9. At its meeting on 20 January 2005 the Select Committee for Culture and Recreation supported the proposal to extend the scheme to non-residents.
10. The Cabinet Member for Leisure approved the proposal to extend the Options+ Scheme to non-residents and to include Pension Credit (Guarantee Element) as an additional eligibility category on 4 April 2005.

Administration

11. It was originally proposed that the libraries and leisure centres would no longer issue cards but would only validate the application forms and proof prior to sending them to a central resource for processing. Although the application forms are received centrally, the cards are still issued from the facilities. The potential for delays in sending out cards and the possible transition to a smart card have lessened the benefits of issuing the card centrally.

What still has to be achieved

12. Private sector providers/retailers have not yet been approached to offer additional concessions for card holders or provide sponsorship. This will not be undertaken until the number of card holders is in excess of 4000. This should make it a more attractive proposition for the private sector.
13. Due to limited administrative support there is little tracking of usage and income across services other than the main leisure centres. In the longer term there is the potential to integrate the Options+ card into the Black Country Smart Card

Project, which is supported by the E-Dudley Steering Group. Discussions are currently being held with Dudley Plus to identify if they can support the administration of the Options+ Scheme.

14. Little promotional activity has been undertaken since March 2005 to encourage take up of the scheme, although a radio advertising campaign is planned for early autumn.
15. Since the Options+ scheme was launched there have been a number of suggestions from residents asking for Attendance Allowance to be added to the eligibility criteria. Attendance Allowance is:
 - paid to individuals who need help to look after themselves
 - paid to individuals who become ill or disabled on or after their 65 birthday, or are claiming on or after their 65 birthday.
 - paid to those who have needed help for at least six months
 - not affected by savings
 - not usually affected by other money they having coming in

Finance

16. The cost of administering the scheme is met from within existing revenue budgets.

Law

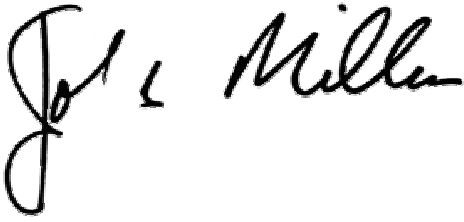
17. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 empowers the Council to provide recreational facilities in its area.
18. To Section 19(2) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 empowers the Council to make recreational facilities available for use by such persons as the Council thinks fit either without charge or on such pay.
19. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its statutory functions.

Equality Impact

20. The breakdown of Eligibility Categories, Gender, Ethnicity and Age are shown in Appendices 1-4.

Recommendation

21. It is recommended that:-
 - The Members consider the content of this report and comment accordingly for the Cabinet Member for Leisure's consideration.



J. B. MILLAR
DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Contact Officer: Matt Weetman – Recreation Officer
Ext.5587
Email: matt.weetman@dudley.gov.uk

Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-

Select Committee – Culture & Recreation - 8 September 2003
Decision Sheet - Cabinet Member for Leisure - 19 November 2003
Select Committee – Culture & Recreation - 20 January 2005
Decision Sheet - Cabinet Member for Leisure – 4 April 2005