

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance, Policy and Resources
DATE	March 2017
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT	Review of Access to Leisure Scheme
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/17/ 017
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update this Committee with the responses received from the Disability Equity Partnership (DEP) and the Grampian Region Equality Council (GREC) whose views were sought on proposed changes to the Council's Access to Leisure (A2L) scheme, recommended by the cross-service / ALEO Access to Leisure Working Group. This follows the initial report to this Committee in May 2014 which set out both policy recommendations and specific actions recommended by the Council's Consultants, Strategic Leisure Ltd. These recommendation have since been considered in further detail by the A2L Working Group, with a previous report to this committee in September 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Note the responses to the consultation with DEP and GREC as required by this Committee;
- b) Approve changes to the current scheme based on the following:
 - I. Eligibility based on receipt of disability and / or income related welfare benefits;
 - II. In the case of disability and / or long-term conditions, evidence based referral from a health professional;
 - III. Age entitlement linked to national state retirement age and / or free bus travel entitlement;
- c) Approve the provision of subsidised teas and coffees only be provided by partners 'Loyalty Card' arrangements;

- d) Approve the reduction in discount for crèche and childcare related activities to 25% across the services and the discount for crèche provision in sports centres should only be applicable when the parent/carer is taking part in sport and physical activity.
- e) Approve the proposal that the revised A2L scheme be applicable during all public opening hours of the facilities and services.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council's Early Years' Service has a budgetary provision of £20k to support Access to Leisure participation. Costs associated with the current access to leisure entitlement has reached £50k. As part of the service budget savings it has agreed to make the service cost neutral within five years and the proposal to reduce the A2L discount to 25% will support this requirement.

The Council's Museum and Galleries Service receives no additional budget to cover the provision of half price teas and coffees. The proposed changes to the scheme to offer reductions by way of a loyalty discount will have a marginal positive impact on the service.

The Council's sporting Arms' Length External Organisations (ALEO's) including Sport Aberdeen, Garthdee Alpine Snowsports Centre and Aberdeen Sports Village are required to recognise the scheme and this is built into their core grant settlement.

Except as outlined above in terms of the Early Years' Service changes to the A2L scheme will have a neutral impact on the Council's overall budgetary position.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Legal – Whilst there is no statutory obligation for the City to provide A2L it is included within the contractual arrangements with all ALEO's.
- 4.2 Resource – In order to market the scheme additional resource will be required which will be met from existing budgets. There will be no implications on the additional resource.
- 4.3 Personnel – A2L is administered through the Customer Service teams at the Customer Service Centre and Customer Access Points and libraries. Future plans may include administering A2L cards at venues where they are available for use and this would require additional training for staff on the process involved. This additional time would be minimal. The launch of the new A2L scheme personnel training will be required in order to ensure accurate monitoring and evaluation of the scheme going forward.

- 4.4 Property – No implications.
- 4.5 Equipment/Health and Safety – All equipment within each organisation will be to a high standard where it is regularly checked to ensure compliance with regulation standards. For the purpose of A2L it is noted that there may be additional needs concerning equipment and those that meet the criteria of A2L i.e. disability but additional provisions will be put in place to ensure no risk is presented. All ALEO's adhere to their own health and safety policies which encompasses the A2L requirements.

5. BACKGROUND / KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 A previous report considered at the Finance, Policy & Resources Committee in May 2014 approved 10 policy recommendations and made 6 specific recommendations in relation to operational changes that were being proposed, including the setting up of an Access to Leisure Working Group to identify the specific actions and implications of some of the changes being proposed. A Working Group comprising Officers from ECS (Museums and Galleries, Accord Card Team, Assets and Finance, Equalities, Policy, Performance and Resources, Early Years Services and representatives from the Council's Arms' Length External Organisations (ALEO's) including Sport Aberdeen, Aberdeen Sports Village and Garthdee Alpine Snow Sports Centre has been established and is leading this A2L review.
- 5.2 Since that time this Committee has considered further reports from the Working Group. At the last meeting the Committee instructed Officers to pass the report in its entirety to the Disability Equity Partnership (DEP) and also to the Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) for their views, in light of any possible impacts on key groups currently covered by the A2L scheme.
- 5.3 Representatives of the A2L Working Group provided the FP&R Committee report in full to both DEP and GREC as required by this Committee, together with supporting background information. They also attended the December meeting of the DEP using this as an opportunity to provide further information on the proposed amendments to the A2L scheme and to receive feedback. They also met directly with GREC representatives for the same purpose.
- 5.4 The full responses from each organisation are appended to this report as Appendix A (DEP) and Appendix B (GREC).
- 5.5 The response from DEP is broadly supportive of the A2L Working Group proposals for revisions to the current scheme. The DEP response supports an A2L scheme operating within Aberdeen City which gives reduced prices to people with disabilities or long term health problems to all sport, leisure and cultural activities provided by Aberdeen City Council and its ALEO's. In practice this goes beyond the current scheme, as not all cultural activities provided by ALEO's are

formally included within the scheme. DEP also agrees with the findings of the Working Group that the current scheme is complicated, confusing and not as widely marketed as it might be. It identifies that future marketing of the scheme should therefore be more targeted towards those who would most likely benefit from the scheme. This fully supports the findings of the original Consultants and the Working Group and the recommendations to simplify the scheme, its administration and improve the marketing of the scheme.

5.6 DEP have also provided a number of areas for the Council to consider in devising a new or replacement A2L scheme. Again these all support the previous recommendations made by the Working Group in the following key areas:

- a) Improved marketing of the A2L scheme, particularly aimed at those to whom the scheme is intended with clearer messages around the importance of sport and physical activity participation to physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- b) Pricing policy: A reduced admission rate for residents with a disability to reduce the potential impact of price as a barrier to participation;
- c) A simplified application process clearly linking entitlement for people with disabilities, linked to receipt of a recognised disability benefit, free bus travel and /or blue badge entitlement; exceptionally, where a disabled applicant is unable to prove entitlement in this way an evidenced based health referral would be acceptable;
- d) Facilities should be available at all times, not just off-peak to encourage social participation with friends and / or family at peak times.

5.7 A number of other suggestions are also made by DEP which are outside of the current remit of the Working Group but will be taken forward for further discussion and consideration by the Working Group and / or directly by ALEO's.

5.8 The GREC response is also supportive of the proposed changes for aligning the scheme with the national retirement age and entitlement to free bus travel. It does however identify that it will be important to monitor whether there is any adverse change of service users by those in their early to mid-60's. The removal of asylum seekers as a eligibility category is not anticipated to have a significant impact given the very low numbers of asylum seekers in Aberdeen City at present. GREC itself has considered that DEP is best placed to provide a response in terms of the impact of the proposed changes on those with a disability. It does however support the potential for individuals to provide evidence of entitlement by way of a letter from GP's or Specialists as a means of ensuring that those who may be adversely affected by future welfare reform changes are protected.

- 5.9 As a result of the broad level of support shown by both organisations, the Working Group recommend that changes to the current A2L scheme be made so that eligibility is based on the following:
- Receipt of disability and / or income-related welfare benefit;
 - In the case of disability and / or long-term condition evidence-based referral from health professional;
 - Age entitlement linked to national state retirement age and / or free bus travel entitlement;
- 5.10 It is also recommended that previously recommended changes to the scheme in terms of removal of free teas and coffees and for such provision to be by means of partners /ALEO's loyalty card arrangements, a reduction in the maximum discount of 25% for crèche activities and extension of the scheme to cover all opening hours of sports venues be incorporated into a revised scheme.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

The purpose of the A2L scheme is to encourage participation in sport and physical activity for those that currently experience barriers to participation. Through a more robust and targeted A2L scheme the customer experience will be simplified and therefore enhanced. The customer is the main focus in the A2L scheme and the proposed changes are in order to improve the customer experience.

Improving Staff Experience –

Staff have collaborated, in the shape of the A2L working group, to contribute to the proposed changes of the scheme. Staff currently involved are engaged with the new scheme therefore committed to the delivery of it.

Improving our use of Resources –

The new scheme will be marketed and promoted to a high standard. Through staff awareness of the scheme services will be able to promote the scheme accordingly to the benefit of both the staff and the customer. Through the establishment of an A2L working group this provides a more coordinated approach across all key organisations and services.

Corporate -

A number of plans and papers have been addressed and reviewed for the purpose of this report. These include;

- Review of the Access to Leisure Plan
- Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) Locality Plans
- Welfare Reform

- National Retirement Age

Public –

EHRIA attached.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The recommendations contained within this revised concerning a re-aligned A2L scheme may impact on the financial position of both council's services offering A2L subsidies and the financial positions of its ALEO partners. The risk is considered to be low. Revisions to the A2L scheme in terms of reducing maximum subsidies for crèche and requiring evidenced entitlement to A2L card holders are key ways in which the financial risks will be managed and reduced to an acceptable level. Furthermore, regular monitoring of the uptake and impact of the council and its ALEO's will also be undertaken.

The recommendations may also impact on customers and citizens, particularly those who may no longer be entitled. This risk is also considered to be low. This risk will be managed through a robust marketing and communications plan, with the revised scheme marketed towards those for whom the scheme is intended.

In each case, risks will be monitored through the working group.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Review of Access to Leisure Scheme, Finance, Policy and Resources Committee – September 2016

Review of Access to Leisure Scheme, Finance, Policy and Resources Committee – 6 May 2014

Review of Access to Leisure Scheme (A2L) – Final report – December 2013. Strategic Leisure Ltd

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