

Appendix B: Review of Access to Leisure Scheme

Response of the Grampian Regional Equalities Council (GREC) to Finance Policy and Resources Committee's Review of the Access to Leisure Scheme

Consultation meeting date: 25 November 2016 (Dave Black, General Manager)
Response received: 23 December 2016

A significant amount of work has clearly gone into evaluating the current scheme and to seeking to shape a future scheme which will better fit the needs of targeted individuals and communities, as well as being better aligned with City-wide objectives to tackle inequalities, including health inequalities.

Given the potential impact on disabled people, and that disability is one of the barriers to leisure that the scheme is aiming to address, GREC welcomes that the new Disability Equity Partnership has been consulted on the process; the range and wealth of experience in the partnership will provide invaluable insight. Of particular interest will be if the alignment of the scheme with the benefits brought in by welfare reform raises concerns. In this way the ability for individuals to provide letters to prove entitlement from GPs or Specialists will be important.

In terms of older people who may be negatively impacted by the changes, i.e. those in their late 50s who may be anticipating access to the scheme when they turn 60, the proposal is to bring the scheme in line with entitlement to free bus passes (in terms of national retirement age) and so this seems fair. People in their early to mid-60s who face cost as a barrier to leisure services may qualify for the scheme under low income criteria. It will however be useful to monitor the impact of the change in the scheme on the use of services by those in their early to mid-60s.

The Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment highlights a positive and negative impact in terms of pregnancy and maternity; it appears that the positive impact is that some of the access to crèche services from the old scheme would continue (at a 25% rate as opposed to a 50% reduction rate), but this does not seem to be a positive Impact, rather a neutral one. The reduction in the discount rate for the service would likely have a negative impact, as noted already. In terms of impact on race/ethnicity: the criteria would no longer automatically entitle asylum seekers to the scheme, and therefore there is a very small potential impact here, given the very low numbers of asylum seekers in Aberdeen City at present.

One general concern, is the impact of the changes in the scheme in relation to loneliness and isolation. Recent studies have highlighted the significant negative impact that loneliness can have on health (both mental and physical) and the length of time that individuals can live independently. Therefore it would be useful to get the input from Health and Social Care and Public Health colleagues on the dilution of the "social" elements of the scheme, such as the discounts on teas and coffees. Key information would likely be: are the people making use of these discounts people

that would otherwise be more isolated and lonely; and how does/can the A2L scheme complement any strategies for reducing isolation in the City.