

CULTURE, LEISURE AND TOURISM PORTFOLIO

DECISION RECORD

19 August 2008

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Victor Tumilty (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Pat Usher, Sport and Recreation Manager
Sarah Bird, Democratic Services Officer

7. Active Card – Review of Eligibility Criteria for Leisure Concessionary Charging *(Sport and Recreation Manager)*

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

The report was presented to inform the Portfolio Holder on the amendment of the eligibility criteria for the Active Card concessionary pricing scheme to include over 60 year olds from 1 September 2008. Approval was also sought for an appropriate refund system to be put in place for any fees already been paid by current Active Card holders aged over 60 for the card itself or swim season tickets.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Active Card scheme was initially introduced in April 2003 to cover all activities offered by Sport and Recreation within the Leisure Centre and Sports Development Services. Prior to that, research had been undertaken by officers in order to ensure that concessionary pricing was offered to those Hartlepool identified as being most in need. At that time senior citizens were not specifically included as a separate concessionary category although it was considered that those on low income would qualify. It was now accepted that increased participation in sport can make a huge impact on health although usually participation in sport declines with age. In Hartlepool, current data estimates that over 20% of residents are aged 60 or over and despite all documented health benefits, levels of physical activity amongst that age group remains very low.

In November 2006 a report was commissioned to examine the Authority's approach to the application of concessionary charges across Community Services in general. This focused on the application of concessions to the over 60s, and established that the approach taken with the Active Card was inconsistent with elsewhere. Coupled with the benefits of ensuring participation of this age group in sport and physical activity the evidence was compelling to include the over 60s as a specific concessionary category for the Active Card. Concessionary rates would not be available to any resident without possession of an Active Card.

It was recognised that the introduction of extending the concessionary eligibility would incur a cost and was estimated to be around £20,000 although this was based on several unknowns and there could be a requirement for additional resources in the future. The £20,000 had been highlighted as a budget pressure as part of the 2008/2009 proposals and the additional resource had been approved.

It was therefore proposed to implement the inclusion of the over 60s as a concessionary category of the Active Card from 1 September 2008 which will mean that the card is now available free of charge instead of £10.50. The cost of participation in activities will also significantly reduce.

Some over 60s may have already previously purchased an Active Card and could potentially enquire about the reimbursement of fees. With the refunding process being time consuming administratively and with the amounts involved being potentially small, it was not considered appropriate to offer a refund in these cases. Obviously under the previous system, these Active Card holders will have already had their application considered on an 'ability to pay' basis.

Similarly, some may have already purchased swimming season tickets. However, with the costs involved being greater (one year ticket £103.00 compared to £79.50 and six months ticket £65.50 compared to £48.00), it was considered reasonable to offer a refund in the form of a credit to be redeemed against the future purchase of season tickets. This would be calculated on a pro rata basis for full calendar months.

The Portfolio Holder enquired whether re-imbursement would entail a lot of extra work for officers and was informed that this had been taken into consideration in the decision not to reimburse those who had already purchased an Active Card.

The Portfolio Holder commented that Hartlepool appeared to be leading the way in lowering fees for the over 60s and was informed that the new charges would make this Authority's fee for a swimming session significantly lower than others in the area.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder:-

- ❖ Noted the inclusion of over 60s as a specific eligibility criteria for concessionary charges as part of the Active Card scheme from 1 September 2008
- ❖ Approved the approach to be taken for any request of reimbursement of fees paid for either the Active Card or Swim Season Ticket purchased for the post September 2008 period.

8. Culture Shock Project (*Sport and Recreation Manager*)

Type of decision

Non key.

Purpose of report

The report was presented to advise the Portfolio Holder of the implications and requirements of being a partner in the Culture Shock programme.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

Culture Shock is a Heritage Lottery funded project to enable people to explore, document and share their heritage with people from both similar and different backgrounds, through the use of digital storytelling and museum collections, to help them explore their own identities, develop a sense of citizenship and to challenge preconceptions, prejudice and intolerance between different groups. The project aims to capture 1000 digital stories over two years and is led by Tyne and Wear Museums.

Funding for two project employees will be borne by the project grant although Hartlepool will provide office accommodation. This Authority will receive a pro-rata percentage of the project budget. Subjects that would possibly be covered by the digital stories included the 150th anniversary of Cameron's brewery, 25th anniversary of the miners' strike, 2012 Cultural Olympiad. The Portfolio Holder suggested other subjects including the local steel and forging industries, matchbox factory, Cerebos salt works, clothing industry and local ship building. He suggested that a wide age range of participants be encouraged.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder supported participation in Culture Shock as it would give Hartlepool national coverage being one of only three such projects nationally.

9. Free Swimming Scheme Proposals (*Sport and Recreation Manager*)

Type of Decision

Non key.

Purpose of Report

The report was presented in order to update the Portfolio Holder on the details available to date following the recent Government announcement concerning a nationwide free swimming scheme. The report provided the information available on the Government's intention for the implementation of the scheme and the funding available to support it.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Government has set a target of getting 2 million people more active by the 2012 Olympics and associated with this has been the recent announcement by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) concerning a free swimming initiative.

Details were provided of the four distinct elements of funding.

- ❖ Pot 1: Free swimming for over 60's available for financial years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. An allocation of £26,848 per annum was being offered to Hartlepool to fund this and confirmation of acceptance required by 15 September, 2008.
- ❖ Pot 2: Free swimming for under 16's available during financial years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Hartlepool would need to commit to Pot 1 to be eligible for this and if interest in this was registered by 15 September 2008, funding allocation would be advised by 30 September 2008 with acceptance of this being confirmed by 15 October 2008. The Government had indicated that 'Local Authorities will work creatively with local partners, including Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to access funds from other sources' for this initiative and officers interpreted this to mean that additional partnership funding should be sourced.
- ❖ Pot 3: Modernising Pool Provision - Capital Reward Fund. Available for 2008-2009 as a one-off capital grant and only to those Local Authorities participating in the initiatives detailed in (a) and (b) above. £10 million was being made available nationally and the Authority would be advised of an amount allocated on a pro-rata population basis with an indication of £3,000 being available.
- ❖ Pot 4: Modernising Pool Provision - Capital Challenge Fund. Available for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, £25 million per annum was being made available nationally. Again, only those Local Authorities committing to Pots 1 and 2 would be eligible and costed plans had to be submitted by 15 October 2008.

The free swim scheme and reimbursement of lost income from a central government pot was welcomed but it was uncertain at present whether the current offer of £26,848 would fully neutralise the potential impact on the Council's revenue budget. Officers were confident that the older person swim initiative would be cost neutral but the details of the support grant available for under 16s free swim would not be finalized until after the Authority had expressed its intention to participate. It was recommended that a positive response to the schemes was submitted.

The Portfolio Holder hoped that parents would not use the free swim sessions as a child minding session but would be encouraged to participate too.

The Portfolio Holder expressed concern regarding the short timescale for submission of costed plans for the Capital Challenge Fund bid and the pressure this would put on officers. He was informed that work done on the recent indoor sports strategy should support this.

The Portfolio Holder asked about the lack of funding offered for those aged between 16 and 60 and was informed that a bid had recently been submitted to the PCT to assist with this but as yet a response had not been received.

The Portfolio Holder expressed concern about the condition of the Mill House Leisure Centre but suggested that it may not be cost effective to make improvements in the light of an imminent decision regarding the future swimming facilities in the town.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder:-

- ❖ Noted the details available to date in relation to the Government's Free Swimming Scheme
- ❖ Approved the participation in the Over 60s Free Swimming initiative and acceptance of the funding offer from the DCMS as already detailed and once confirmed the Under 16s scheme if officers were confident it would not cause budgetary pressure
- ❖ Approved the intention to participate in the other elements of the scheme should officers on receipt of more detailed information, conclude that it would be appropriate and of benefit for Hartlepool to do so
- ❖ Approve consideration of a capital pot submission for swimming pool improvement in 2009/2010 onwards

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am

PETER DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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