



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: HEALTH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Date of Meeting: 1st September 2003

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: Yes

Inside/Outside Policy Framework

Title: LEISURE CARD AMENDMENT PROPOSALS
Report of: HEAD OF CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT
Report reference: CLS 60/03

Summary: This report notifies members of a proposed change to the eligibility criteria for the Carlisle Access Card.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the Executive approve the following changes:

1. Remove the Family Credit eligibility from the scheme.
2. Approve the use of housing benefit as an additional qualifying criterion.

Contact Officer: Mark Beveridge

Ext: 7350

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members will be aware that the Council under the former Leisuretime operation introduced a leisure card for the population of Carlisle. As part of this scheme specific target groups were identified who would receive additional benefits of being a card holder. This provides access to the facilities now managed by Carlisle Leisure Ltd at 50% - 75% discount on the full price of admission. The purpose of which was to encourage use of facilities by people in disadvantaged groups, e.g. low waged, unemployed students etc.

Eligibility for the card was originally via a number of criteria; including Family Credit. In April 2003 the Government replaced this type of credit along with child allowances with Working Tax Credit. However while Family Credit was aimed at families with low incomes exclusively and child allowance was not an allowable criteria for the card, the new credit has a wider remit similar to the old child allowance.

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION

The population of Carlisle is 100,739 (census 2001), of which 48% are male and 52% female. The economic profile of 16-74 year olds shows 61.8% of the population are working, 3.5% are unemployed, 5.5% students, 15.8% retired, 5% look after a home/family and 6.1% are permanently sick or disabled.

In August 2000, there were 1360 jobseeker allowance claimants in Carlisle, plus 6,085 Income Support claimants.

3. IMPACT OF NEW ARRANGEMENT

Families in receipt of Working Tax credit can now earn a maximum of £50,000 before becoming ineligible for the credit. The sum received by families in such an income bracket is lower compared to those on the minimum income of £5,060, however if adopted as a criteria the majority of families in the Carlisle area would be eligible for the associated discounts.

The consequence of this is that the discount previously aimed at certain target groups would be open to a much wider group. If Working Tax Credit were to be part of the eligible criteria would severely reduce the income of CLL, which in turn would most likely be sought from the Council as a variation to contract.

4. PROPOSAL

It is not possible to identify how many people who received Family Credit are leisure cardholders because there is no simple database to interrogate. However it is known that there are 957 cardholders on a benefit of some kind plus 339 junior holders out of a total leisure card issue of around 12,000. CLL have written to all these people to determine which benefit they used to obtain the card initially and in the mean time have extended their card use until the end of this calendar year.

It is proposed to remove the Family Credit eligibility because it no longer exists. Along with the existing benefits/criteria of income support, job seekers allowance, people over 60, disability allowance, and full time student cards, which are eligible, Housing Benefit will be added. People who wish to get the leisure card using one of the existing criteria or Housing benefit will still be able to do so, however Working Tax Credit alone will not be sufficient. The financial position for CLL will not change as a result of this amendment and the card retains its viability as a vehicle for increasing participation.

5. CONCLUSION

The development of a leisure card is regarded as a very successful method of increasing the participation levels of people in low-income groups. The method by which such groups are able to access the card will over time change as a result of changes to the benefits system. The amendment proposed is one such change and is unlikely to be the last, however so long as the focus remains one of trying to increase participation and the process is not made any more difficult then the Leisure Card remains a key strategic tool in tackling exclusion.

6. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS

Nil in the context of this report

7. HEAD OF FINANCE'S COMMENTS

The Head of Culture Leisure and Sports should ensure the formal agreement with Carlisle Leisure Limited that there will be no financial consequences on the Council as a result of this change.

8. HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMENTS

It is considered by the Head of service that the approach outlined in the report is the most effective way of re-aligning the Leisure Card Scheme to achieve the Council's stated policy objectives in assisting access to leisure facilities for low income groups, following the recent changes to the benefits system."

9. CORPORATE COMMENTS

None.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

n/a

11. EQUALITY ISSUES

The very basis of the scheme is to improve equality of access the changes proposed seek to ensure that this remains so.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

n/a

13. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

The role of sport in the reduction crime and disorder is well proven and the changes seek to continue assisting with the Council's efforts to reduce crime in the area.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members approve the removal of the Family Credit from the eligibility criteria for the Leisure Card and approve the introduction of housing benefit.

15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The adoption of the Working Tax Credit as eligible criteria would potentially have a serious financial impact on CLL and would require Carlisle City Council to make up the shortfall income if the scheme was implemented as a Council initiative. In addition such a move would do nothing to help target the resources where they are most needed and work against City Vision objectives.

MARK BEVERIDGE

Head of Culture, Leisure & Sport Services