

REPORT TO COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 5 NOVEMBER 2020

LIVE LIFE ABERDEENSHIRE PRICING

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the Live Life Aberdeenshire approach to service pricing for the period between August 31, 2020 up to March 31, 2021.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Endorse the flexible approach to pricing for LLA products and services that has been taken to date**
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Head of Life Long Learning and Leisure to approve pricing changes without referring back to Communities Committee until 31st March 2021**
- 2.3 Agree to receive an update report on the use of this power.**

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 Charges for Aberdeenshire Council services are governed by the Corporate Charging Framework, which has been developed using the principles agreed through the Scrutiny & Audit investigation titled 'Charging for Services – Are you getting it right?'. Key principles underpinning this framework include:
- A presumption of full cost recovery for services where possible and appropriate
 - Recognition that where a subsidy for services is provided this should be a) understood and qualifies and b) regularly reviewed
 - Any changes to fees should be subject to customer engagement
 - A requirement for services to review their charges on a three-year cycle.
- 3.2 Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA), following its review of prices in 2016/17 adopted and agreed a Pricing policy for all its services (Communities Committee – Feb 23, 2017, ECS Committee February 16, 2017, Infrastructure Services Committee March 16, 2017). Key principles underpinning this policy were:
- A recognition that 100% cost recovery was not realistic in most cases, with many prices set at a 60% cost recovery level justified on the basis of the resultant physical and mental health benefits of users – with a resultant reduction in requirement for acute health treatment.
 - Further concessions for low income groups for whom a standard price may prove a barrier, and for groups who were not able to earn an income (for example young people).

- Establishment of a monthly membership scheme to encourage customers to regularly use our facilities.

3.3 There is limitation to all Officer powers within the Scheme of Governance and whilst the Scheme delegates the power to the Head of Life Long Learning and Leisure to set charges for educational establishment lets, leisure facilities, cultural events, sports development, coaching and other initiatives this is limited by amongst other provisions, the requirements of the Corporate Charging Framework. The Framework requires Committee to approve charging structures every three-years and any changes out with the inflationary uplift delegated to the Head of Finance.

3.4 LLA has worked within the framework of its charging policy as approved previously through Committee.

3.5 The COVID pandemic has resulted in a shutdown of LLA indoor facilities from March 21 to 30 June, followed by a gradual and ongoing re-opening process in line with legislation and guidance from the Scottish Government. All services at reintroduction have been adapted to ensure that they are 'COVID compliant'. This has had the following practical impacts:

- A reduction in service capacity.
- A reduced volume of opening hours.
- A requirement to move exclusively to online booking and payment
- A reticence from some users to return to services

In addition to the above LLA has also had to support education through the provision of extra space for curricular delivery at campus facilities and in some cases in dedicated public facilities.

3.6 Outcomes of the impacts above are

- Increased cost of services due to reduced capacity and additional cleaning costs.
- A reduction in the amount of space available for groups to use.
- A need to work with vulnerable customers, especially those with health issues, to ensure that they can access LLA services to obtain health and wellbeing benefits.

3.7 LLA recognises that to meet the challenges created by the pandemic a more flexible approach to charging is required until March 2021 when the pricing structure will be reviewed. Through a more flexible approach to pricing the service aims to

- Encourage participation and thereby improve health and wellbeing and begin the process by which the service can recover income.
- Reflect the reduced level of service that is available as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions and ensure this is fairly distributed.
- Maximise access for low income groups and (working with the Health and Social Care Partnership) groups with acute health issues.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 In order to meet the objectives in 3.7, LLA has (or intends to) undertake the following actions:
- 4.1.1 Continue with the suspension of the 'Live Life Aberdeenshire direct debit membership scheme' on the basis that there are alternative pricing options that recognize frequency of use, and are more appropriate as a result of both the reduced scope of services available and the need to discourage very high usage by individuals to ensure fair access to services by all residents.
 - 4.1.2 Where groups request or require exclusive facility usage which results in a significant cost to LLA e.g. cleaning, it is the intention of officers to request those groups make a contribution towards those extra costs. As an example, swim clubs traditionally have benefitted from early morning swim lane usage at heavily discounted rates. This usage has been traditionally been justified on the basis that the public may then access adjacent pool lanes and customers may access other dry facilities (i.e. fitness rooms), increasing income from other areas. Currently there is no opportunity to allow other pool users and other on-site facilities are now closed at that time. Therefore, to justify early morning use in that situation LLA would request a contribution toward costs to justify continuation of this service.
 - 4.1.3 LLA, in common with other council services, is incurring additional cleansing and sanitisation costs, which have not been factored into existing price calculations. In tandem with education, LLA will be looking to pass on a proportion of these costs to those who regularly hire facilities. As an example, a martial arts group hiring a badminton court for 2 hours may be asked to pay an extra £5 for the nightly hire.
 - 4.1.4 Officers will routinely utilise delegated powers to amend fees where social distancing makes the current fee structure untenable or the product is a new one. However, officers will ensure that they use the existing fee structure as a guide wherever possible.
 - 4.1.5 It is officers' intention to work directly with the Health and Social Care Partnership to identify where there are requirements for 'targeted' projects aimed at particular client groups with acute health needs. In those cases, delegated authority will be used to set prices for the products as appropriate.
- 4.2 It is important to highlight that LLA will be working within its agreed pricing framework, and for clarity the following has not changed
- 4.2.1 All concession prices and qualifying criteria will remain in place.
 - 4.2.2 The existing differential in charges for commercial and standard lets will remain in place.

4.2.3 Where schools utilise LLA facilities for curriculum use, they will be charged for usage.

4.3 Under the Councils Charging policy, it is incumbent upon both LLA and ECS to undertake a review of its charging policy every 3 years. Both LLA and ECS expected to commence this review earlier in 2020, but the management of the pandemic has made this process impractical. A subsequent report to this committee detailing a timetable for this review is expected later in the financial year.

4.4 Officers from Education and Children’s services have been consulted as part of this report and agree with the recommendations.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report is relevant to all three ‘pillars’ of the forthcoming council priorities in that:

- An effective pandemic pricing policy will maximise the impact our services can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of our people
- The ability to encourage residents into our facilities and allowing some groups a degree of flexibility in access and pricing will assist in developing resilient communities (Our Environment).
- It is expected that this approach will maximise usage and income so contributing to supporting our economy

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation is agreed.

| Subject | Yes | No | N/A |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Financial | X | | |
| Staffing | X | | |
| Equalities | | | X |
| Fairer Scotland Duty | | | X |
| Town Centre First | | | X |
| Sustainability | X | | |
| Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing | X | | |

- It is anticipated that the recommendations will have a positive impact in terms of maximising income and usage. It has been recognised through the Adapted Services Board, SLT and Recovery Reference Group that it is not realistic that the service will achieve its income targets for 2020/21, and that the ability to make savings is limited.
- The service anticipates that it will deliver the products and services using existing staff
- The recommendations are designed to assist the service in being sustainable as it develops services in the pandemic environment – as it will

give staff some surety that they can be flexible in terms of pricing in order to deliver services.

- The ability to deliver services to children and young people is expected to be enhanced through this recommendation.

5.3 An equality impact assessment has been carried out as part of this process and is enclosed as appendix 1 to this document.

5.4 No particular corporate or directorate risks have been identified as specifically pertinent to this report and recommendations, though it is hoped that the flexible approach to charging will minimise the likelihood of reputational risk to Aberdeenshire Council.

6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

6.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section D.6.6.1 (ensure the adequate provision, development and support of facilities), D 6.6.4 (exercise the functions and duties of the Council to ensure the adequate provision, development and support of facilities for cultural and social activities) and D 6.6.7 (determine appropriate promotional initiatives) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance.

Laurence Findlay Director of Education and Children's Services

Report prepared by: Tim Stephen, Service Manager for Facilities and Funding,
Live Life Aberdeenshire

Date: 30 September 2020

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

| EIA Version | Date | Author | Changes |
|-------------|------------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | 15/10/2020 | Tim Stephen | |

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions including those that affect services the council delivers).

| | |
|---|---|
| Service | Education and Children’s Services |
| Section | Live Life Aberdeenshire |
| Title of the activity etc. | Pricing of LLA services for the period Oct 2020 – March 2021 |
| Aims and desired outcomes of the activity | Ensure that services are accessible by users recognising the impact of the pandemic |
| Author(s) & Title(s) | Tim Stephen, Service Manager, Facilities and Funding |

Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment and explain what it means in relation to the activity you are assessing.

| Evidence | What does it say? | What does it mean? |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Customer feedback | <p>Predominantly that price is not a key factor in accessing services, key issues are more related to new means of access (lack of changing rooms, need to pay by internet and reduced capacity).</p> <p>There have been some concerns raised about the lack of direct debit price for monthly membership.</p> <p>There have also been some concerns about the lack of access to concessions – although no changes have been made to the existing policy</p> | <p>Key issues are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A demand to be able to access Health and Wellbeing services. - A degree of frustration at the reduced availability of services - Some financial concerns, potentially amongst groups whose job prospects are impacted by the current pandemic. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Internal consultation with staff. | Staff are enthusiastic about the provision of services and have clear guidance on protocols regarding internet booking and limited staff contact. Staff recognise that this impacts on some customers more than others. (not specifically on any protected groups). | Staff are keen to deliver, but recognise the impact of new measures on a small number of existing customers |
| External consultation - NGB's, User Groups etc. | Groups have been requesting information on availability and safe means of operating. In some instances, groups have highlighted a willingness to contribute extra to access facilities when they may otherwise be closed | Groups are currently more concerned about access to facilities than price |
| External data | LLA read feedback from sportscotland, but there has been no specific data relating to charges for sports facilities since these have been able to reopen. | |
| Other (general information as appropriate). | It should be noted that a lot of the access restrictions (not including price) have been proscribed by National Govt and via National governing bodies of sport – and are therefore not negotiable. | |

Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.

| | |
|---|--|
| Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold? | <p>This report is designed to assist with a unique situation over a relatively short time period, where there is the potential for a number of variables to impact delivery of service at any time.</p> <p>This report has been commissioned particularly because we recognise there may be gaps in provision/ information during this unique period – and having the flexibility to address them as they arise will assist the service.</p> |
|---|--|

Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.

| | | |
|--|--|------------|
| What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form. | Measures: | Timescale: |
| | Ongoing feedback from customer via social media, customer comments and site feedback | commenced |
| | Feedback from the Health and Social Care Partnership | commenced |

Stage 5: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups/areas?

These should be included in the action plan.

Ongoing communication about services, prices and promotions via:

- Our website
- Our Social Media sites
- Through partners

Establishment of a dedicated SPA telephone helpline to support the booking process and answer queries from customers who may be unable to easily navigate things online.

Note – there are limited opportunities to publicise services at sites due to the need to discourage waiting and staying at facilities – though staff will do their best to make users aware.

Stage 6: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?

Policy allows us to:

1. Offer targeted promotions to specific groups as the need arises.
2. Manage access to facilities through discouraging 'very heavy use' by some customers to ensure there is space for all users.
3. Allows easy opportunity to work with HSCP to target people with an acute health need.

Stage 7a:

Are there potential impacts on protected groups?

The protected groups covered by the equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Note: We have not included impacts which are unrelated to price. For example the reduced access due to reduced capacity (social distancing) has a negative impact on a number of groups due to reduced access – but has been nationally proscribed and is not directly relevant to this report.

| | Positive | Negative | Neutral | Unknown |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| Age – Younger | | | N | |
| Age - Older | Yes | Yes | | |
| Disability | | Yes | | |
| Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers) | Yes | | | |
| Religion or Belief | | | N | |
| Sex | | | N | |
| Pregnancy and maternity | Yes | | N | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual) | | | N | |
| Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender) | | | N | |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership | | | N | |

Stage 7b: Do you have evidence or reason to believe that this policy, activity etc. will or may impact on socio-economic inequalities?

This is about trying to be fair to everyone. Part of that is realising that not everyone may be starting at the same place. Some individuals and families may have low income, may have very little or no savings which means they are living from month to month therefore changes to council policies/services may have a greater adverse impact on them.

On this basis you should consider potential impacts on individuals/families by:

- Place: on specific vulnerable areas or communities (SIMD, regeneration, rural) e.g. housing, transport.
- Pockets: household resources, (Income, benefits, outgoings) ability to access a service
- Prospects: peoples life chances e.g.access to, or ability to access: employment, training, services (such as council or health) or support.

Groups of people who may be impacted include, but not limited to:

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed • Single parents and vulnerable families • People on benefits • Those involved in the criminal justice system • People in the most deprived communities • People who live in rural areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensioners • Looked after children • Carers including young carers • Veterans • Students • Single adult households • People who have experienced the asylum system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those leaving the care setting including children and young people and those with illness • Homeless people • People with low literacy/numeracy • People with lower educational qualifications • People in low paid work • People with one or more protected characteristic |
|--|--|--|

Please complete by inserting “yes” in the applicable box/boxes below.

| Socio-economic disadvantage | Positive | Negative | Neutral | Unknown |
|---|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| Pockets: Low income/income poverty – cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing | | Yes | | |
| Pockets: Low and/or no wealth – enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future | | Yes | | |
| Pockets: Material deprivation – being unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies | | Yes | | |
| Place: Area deprivation – where you live, where you work | | | N | |
| Prospects: Socioeconomic background – social class i.e. parents education, employment and income, educational achievement. | | | N | |

| Stage 8: What are the positive and negative impacts? | | |
|--|---|--|
| Impacts. | Positive | Negative |
| Older people, race and disability | For older people, family groups with young children and some race groups (i.e gypsy travellers), the ability to pre book space, knowing there will be a degree of privacy or space will be welcomed and provide a new service | For some groups, with feedback from a small number of older people, there is evidence that some people struggle with the internet booking system. This may also apply to people with learning disabilities although no feedback to this effect has yet been received |
| Low income groups. | For many low-income groups – the ability of the service to ‘target’ services at no or low cost may have a positive impact | The lack of casual access may negatively impact on low income groups who have less access to internet and/or who may struggle with the pre -planning required – or have no bank account to pay for bookings |

Stage 9: Have any of the affected groups/areas been involved, engaged with or consulted?

If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?

Not directly – though efforts are underway to obtain feedback where possible.

Stage 10: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?

| | Mitigating Steps | Timescale |
|---|--|---|
| These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form. | Continued use of officer delegated powers to target services at reduced priced where they are needed | Delivered (50% September as an example) |
| | Helpline available to assist people with internet booking | Helpline now established |
| | In extremis – officer to have the power where people really struggle to make an internet booking, to allow pre -arranged access via phone. | In place |
| | Article highlighting the rationale for changes on our website | Oct 23. |
| | Consideration of new appropriately priced direct debit product that manages entry and is appropriately priced. | December 1. |

Stage 11: What monitoring arrangements will be put in place? How the EIA will be used to monitor the proposal

| | |
|---|---|
| These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires). | <p>We will continue to monitor customer feedback and may commission specific engagements on key products (i.e. swimming lessons).</p> <p>However, it should be noted that this is primarily a proposal to manage a unique situation over a short period of time – and allow flexibility accepting that the current pandemic may continue to impact on services in ways we do not yet know. It should also be noted that the service is not intending to deviate significantly from its existing pricing policy – which was significantly consulted on when implemented in 2017.</p> |
|---|---|

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Please complete the appropriate box/boxes | 1 | No negative impacts have been identified –please explain. |
| | 2 | <p>Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain.</p> <p>* Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Some negative impacts have been identified, primarily as a result of the combination of a more strictured booking and pricing system (albeit not significantly changed) and recognition of the fact that there is more financial hardship currently due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Although the reduced capacity of services and range of COVID prompted restrictions are not subject to choice – there is no doubt they exacerbate negative impacts.</p> | |
| 3 | <p>The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain.</p> <p>* Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen</p> |
| | |

* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

Not progressing with the recommendation, and remaining within existing pricing policies would have a significantly worse (negative) impact on services due to an inability to target services at particular service areas, an inability to open facilities at some times due to lack of resources and the potential for a small number of users to overuse scarce services at the expense of other groups.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Sign off and authorisation. | 1) Service and Team | Live Life Aberdeenshire | | |
| | 2) Title of Policy/Activity | Pricing of LLA Sports activities until March 31, 2021 | | |
| | 3) Authors: I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity. | Name: Tim Stephen Position: Service Manager, F & F Date: 15/10/2020 Signature: | Name: Position: Date: Signature: | |
| | | Name: Position: S Date: Signature: | Name: Position: Date: Signature: | |
| | 4) Consultation with Service Manager | Name: Stephen Brown Date: 16/10/2020 | | |
| 5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service | Name: Avril Nicol Position: Head of Service LLA Date: 19/10/2020 | Name: Position: Date: | | |

| | | |
|--|---|---------------------|
| | 6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. | Date: 16/10/2020 |
| | 7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: equalities@aberdeenshire.gov.uk | Date: |

| Action Plan | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--|----------------|--|---|
| Action | Start | Complete | Lead Officer | Expected Outcome | Resource Implications |
| Deliver targeted programmes where applicable, with reduced prices | Commenced | ongoing | Stephen Brown | Targeted reduced price access to services where required | Reduced income |
| Establish helpline to assist with queries and bookings (esp internet bookings) | Commenced | Recruitment underway – improved by Nov 1 | Claire Thomson | Improved access to services by groups (esp. those struggling with the internet bookings) | 2 FTE admin staff |
| Officer delegated powers to waive fees in cases | Nov 1,2020 | | Stephen Brown | Ensure individuals with acute health and wellbeing needs can access services | Minimal lost income |
| Ongoing communication on new prices via website, social media and via partners | Oct 23, 2020 | | Gordon Lyon | Accurate information on pricing and access circulated | 0.2 FTE to oversee. |
| Consideration of new monthly pricing scheme | Commenced | Dec 1, 2020 | Stephen Brown | Appropriate monthly access to facilities and services | 1 FTE offset by improved income through direct debit collections. |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |