

Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 04 March 2025

Subject: Access to Leisure for Unpaid Carers (Pilot)

Cabinet Member: Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Continuous Improvements

Responsible Officer: Dean Emery Head of Revenues, Benefits and Leisure and Andy Mackie Leisure Services Manager

Enclosures: None

Executive Summary

The pilot aims to support unpaid carers by providing them access to leisure services. Recognising the vital role of unpaid carers in Mid Devon, the initiative seeks to alleviate their stress and improve well-being through opportunities for relaxation and social interaction. The pilot is being run on behalf of other Devon leisure facilities.

Recommendation(s):

1. Cabinet approve the pilot as detailed within this report; and
2. Cabinet approves that adult carers receive a 25% discount on membership, or a 20% discount on casual sessions. Additionally, carers under the age of 18 will be granted free access to the facilities; and
3. Cabinet approve delegation to the Deputy Chief Executive (s151) in consultation with the Cabinet member for Service Delivery and Continuous Improvement to make any minor changes as required to enable the pilot to proceed.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 In 2022, a six-month pilot provided unpaid carers free access to leisure facilities. The trial aimed to support carers' health while potentially reducing

reliance on state-funded social care. Initially limited to Adult Carers with a Carers Passport, the scheme later expanded to all unpaid carers.

- 1.2 This trial saw 242 people enrol; 213 adult carers, 13 young carers (16-18), and 16 child carers (<16). A range of data was collected and the results were shared with DCC and NHS colleagues. While all stakeholder showed interest, no one was prepared to fund or co-fund any continuation of the trial so it ended.
- 1.3 Carers provide an estimated £2.3 billion nationally in unpaid care annually some face financial hardship and health issues. The pilot aims to improve carers' well-being, thereby sustaining their caregiving roles.

2.0 Pilot Summary

- 2.1 The pilot will run for a duration of 12 months, from May 2025 to May 2026. During this period, adult carers will receive a 25% discount on membership or a 20% discount on casual sessions. Additionally, carers under the age of 18 will be granted free access to the facilities. To further foster community connections, we will host drop-in sessions with care ambassadors, providing social activities aimed at enhancing engagement among participants.
- 2.2 Introducing this initiative offers numerous benefits. Firstly, access to facilities will enable individuals to prioritise their physical and mental health, while also providing a supportive environment where they can unwind and remain active. Additionally, it presents an opportunity for unpaid carers to take a much-needed break from their responsibilities and focus on self-care. This initiative also encourages social interaction by allowing individuals to meet others in similar situations, thereby fostering the development of a support network. Moreover, offering free membership for those under 18 removes financial barriers, ensuring inclusivity, while discounted rates for adults make participation more affordable for everyone.

3.0 Identification Methods

- 3.1 Eligible individuals include those holding a Carers Passport, young carers who possess a Young Carers ID Card issued by the Devon Carers Young Carers service, and parent carers of children who either have a Max Card from Devon County Council (DCC) or can provide evidence of receiving Carers Allowance or Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

- 3.2 The service has worked with Devon County Council to design the offer.
- 3.3 Mid Devon has c2, 816 registered unpaid carers.
- 3.4 The proposed pilot will offer discounted leisure access to unpaid carers in Mid Devon, acknowledging that 40% of carers report leisure activities reduce loneliness.

4.0 Evaluation

- 4.1 To evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative, it is essential to monitor the number of carers utilising the facilities and track the frequency of their visits. Additionally, conducting surveys to assess the impact on the well-being of carers will provide valuable insights into how the program is benefiting them.
- 4.2 The evaluation will inform future initiatives and improve support for carers.

5.0 Considerations

- 5.1 The scheme could improve carers' physical and mental health, but must balance financial viability. Effective promotion is needed to ensure those most in need benefit.
- 5.2 Additionally, with current demand already exceeding capacity at all three sites, introducing a new membership category could place further strain on resources and lead to overcrowding, diminishing the experience for all our members. Facility capacity may be strained if demand exceeds expectations.
- 5.3 Devon County Council acknowledges the positive impact of the previous trial, particularly in reducing social isolation. Future initiatives should consider equitable access across the county.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 When proposing this pilot project to support unpaid carers through access to leisure services, it is important to consider the financial implications associated with its initiation, execution, and potential sustainability.
- 6.2 Membership Fees; a 25% discount for memberships and a 20% discount for pay as you go participation for services to help offset costs while ensuring affordability. We will increase the discount to 100% for young carers for those under 18 years old.

- 6.3 Funding opportunities will be explored with a view to keeping the offer after the pilot ends.
- 6.4 If the same number of carers accepted the offer as they did last time (1.2), due to the reduced membership fees, the potential loss in earnings would be £26k based on the reduction per adult membership. Considering the free membership for those under 18, the overall loss would total £10k. However, if unpaid adult carers pay the new rate and new adults join, it could generate an additional £78k in revenue. Still, the actual uptake is likely to be considerably lower because a payment is required, the previous pilot was free for adults.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The launch of this pilot aligns closely with our existing corporate objectives. Throughout the duration of the pilot, we will share updates and reports to evaluate participation and capacity. We will also initiate conversations with other organisations to explore potential external funding opportunities.

Legal Implications: None known.

Risk Assessment: While risks are inherent in any pilot project, proactive identification and management can help mitigate these challenges effectively. The pilot project can maximise its potential to support unpaid carers while ensuring that it is inclusive, accessible, and sustainable. Continuous monitoring and adaptation will be crucial to the project's success and its ability to meet the needs of all participants.

Impact on Climate Change: None as a direct result of this report known.

All three leisure facilities have implemented and are continuing to launch various decarbonisation initiatives to lower CO2 emissions.

Equalities Impact Assessment: The proposed pilot project to support unpaid carers by providing access to leisure services is likely to have several positive equalities impacts. However, it is essential to consider potential disparities and ensure that the project is inclusive and accessible to all carers.

- The project can include programs designed specifically for different demographics, such as young carers or older adults, addressing the unique needs of various groups.
- By removing some of the financial barriers to leisure services, the project promotes equal access for all unpaid carers, regardless of socioeconomic status. This is particularly beneficial for low-income carers who may otherwise lack the means to afford leisure activities.

- Involve care ambassadors representatives from the community in the planning process to ensure that the project meets the needs of all carers.
- Prior to launching the pilot, carry out an equality impact assessment to identify potential disparities and areas for improvement.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Offering access to unpaid carers aligns with the corporate plan by promoting inclusivity, social responsibility, and community wellbeing, by recognising the vital role of unpaid carers in Mid Devon.

2) Community, People & Equalities - Involving and engaging with our communities, ensuring everyone is treated with equity and respect, and protecting our most vulnerable. 2.2) we value and will work closely with local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations.

Statutory Officer sign-off

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 & Deputy CEO

Date: 18/02/2025

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 18/02/2025

Statutory Officer: Maria De Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 18/02/2025

Performance and risk: Stephen Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 18/02/2025

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Kelly Lee (Business Manager) & Andy Mackie (Operations Manager)

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Background papers: Candy Worf - Commissioning and Market Development Manager, Lead Commissioner for Carers, and Dementia portfolios.

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=49221>

Edward Walker – Brown, Commissioning Support Officer, Integrated Adult Social Care, Devon County Council.

Mid Devon District Corporate Plan 2024-2028.

Appendix: 1.1 - 2022 Pilot